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AND A MORAL

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JOHN OLIVER HOBBS

SOME EMOTIONS
AND
A MORAL



FOURTH EDITION

LONDON
T. FISHER UNWIN
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SOME EMOTIONS AND A MORAL.

PART I.

I.

“**I**DEALS, my dear Go-
lightly, are the root of
every evil. When a man
forgets his ideals he may
hope for happiness, but
not till then.”

“And if he has none to forget?”

“That he has none to forget,”
said the first speaker slowly, “simply
means that he has not yet been
disappointed.”

“You think he cannot escape
them?”

“I know he cannot. Of course I

am speaking of the Thinking Man—not a human machine.”

The man who had been addressed as Golightly bent back in his chair, and did not reply immediately. He had a pleasant, rest-giving face—rest-giving in its strong suggestion that he was not the man to under-estimate his fellow-creatures, or himself.

“You say that a Thinking Man cannot escape ideals,” he said at last, “and yet you add he cannot be happy till he forgets them. Is not that a little hard on the Thinking Man?”

“Is not everything hard on him?” said the other. “Who can use his eyes and not wonder whether it may not be better to live a satisfied hog than a dissatisfied philosopher? Some days I have almost succeeded in not feeling—almost persuaded myself that after all there is nothing either good or honest—almost doubted my own sincerity in hoping I was mistaken. I suppose that because it has only been a case of ‘almost’ I have not felt happier.”

“Everything depends on what you call being happy,” said Golightly. “The word ‘happiness’ seems to play the writing on the wall to each

man's Belshazzar, and each Belshazzar thinks himself a Daniel. From your point of view, Provence, I should say it simply meant the craving for a new sensation. As for myself—at the risk of appearing frigid—I think there is much to take hold of in the Greek notion : that man is happiest to whom from day to day no evil happens."

Provence rose from his chair and began to pace the floor.

"If I could tell you what I meant by happiness," he said, "I should not want it. I have no pretty talent for definitions. There are some men, I know, who can analyze their first love and wonder with Hume if their passion is the appetite for generation sandwiched between the appreciation for beauty and a generous kindness. They can reduce their God to a diagram and their emotions to a system. If that is philosophy, I have not the first makings of a philosopher. But I know this : I cannot be happy merely because I am not unhappy. It is this unending evenness, this everlasting dulness, which overwhelms me. If I may have nothing better, give me seven devils : one could not be dull with seven devils!"

"You have been overworking," said Golightly, "and this morbidity is the result. All your life you have been zealously bottling your spirits, and now you complain because they are stale. You have always avoided sympathy, and yet you grumble because you are out of touch with the world."

"Sympathy," said Provence, "is the one emotion which seems most perfect as it becomes most animal: in its human aspect it too often lapses into the moralizing grandmother. Animals don't ask questions and cannot answer back. A dog can put more soul into a look than a kind friend can talk in an hour."

He had ceased pacing the floor, and was now sitting in a dark corner of the room. In the twilight Golightly could see the outline of his figure, and the nervous movement of his firm, strong hands.

"Provence," he said, "I have often thought—I know it is a delicate subject—that if you could meet some nice, really nice girl—women are so clever at understanding dispositions——" Here he found the subject not only delicate, but too difficult. He stopped short.

"Girls do not delight me," said Provence; "they appear to have no intermediate stage between the guileless chicken and the coquettish hen. My ideal woman is a combination of the Madonna and the Wood-nymph—with the Wood-nymph element predominating. As for marriage, I fear it is a sadly overrated blessing. Wives are either too much devil or too much angel. Fancy eating bacon every morning of one's life with a blameless creature who was dangling one-quarter of the way from heaven and three-quarters from earth! I should die of respect for her."

"And what if she were too much devil?"

"I should love her horribly," said Provence. "That is the worst of devils—they are so entirely adorable. I don't say I should be particularly anxious to make one the mother of my children; and that I know is the amiable and perfectly correct ambition of the average young man averagely enamoured. But even were I so minded—which the gods forbid—I doubt extremely whether a devil would appreciate the kind intention. There is nothing remarkably exhi-

larating in the prospect of a large family."

Golightly, whose sentiments were more proper than intense, laughed with a twinging conscience. He had never seen Provence in this mood before, and felt a little irritable that there were still some unexplored possibilities in his friend's character. He was not certain, either, that the possibilities hinted at were absolutely satisfactory.

"I don't quite see what you're driving at," he said. "None of this sounds in the least like you."

"I dare say not. You may know a man for twenty years, and in the twenty-first year he will do something which will make your twenty years' experience count for nought. Then you say, 'I should never have expected this from A.' Just as if A would have expected it himself. Men astonish themselves far more than they astonish their friends."

"That may be true of some natures," said Golightly; "but I confess I prefer a character one can swear by."

"A person of that kind is useful, but just a shade monotonous," said

Provence. "Lord! Lord! what a charm is there in variety!"

"Ideas of that sort are very apt to land one in difficulties. You might as well cling to a slippery rock for the fun of falling off. If you were to take a short holiday you would probably come back with saner notions."

"I believe you are getting to the bottom of the matter," said Provence. "I certainly do want change of some sort. I have eaten my fill of chops and tomato sauce: I am hankering for locusts and wild honey and a wilderness."

"In the wilderness one is apt to be tempted of the devil," said Golightly, half under his breath.

Provence laughed. "Man is at best a learned pig," he said, "and the pig nature has its promptings. It will root for truffles in Sahara or Paradise." Then with characteristic abruptness he wished Golightly good-night, and left the house.

When Golightly went down into the drawing-room—for he and Provence had been talking in a small room known to the housemaid as the library—he found three ladies there and a gentleman. The elder of the

ladies was rather stout and had a Wellington nose : she wore a mantle, and a black bonnet which consisted of two velvet strings and an impossible jet butterfly which wobbled on an invisible wire ; her gown was black silk. She reclined in her chair, sipped her tea, and nibbled her muffin, with that air of combined condescension and embarrassment which is usually characteristic of the moneyed relative. The lady at the tea-tray was slim, smooth-cheeked, and perhaps forty ; she had a quantity of mouse-coloured hair, which she wore very elaborately puffed ; her face was pleasing and her expression what is called ladylike—that is to say, it did not betray any one characteristic too strongly, except that of polite acquiescence in generally accepted doctrines. Her husband—who was the gentleman present—considered her a devilish “distanggay”-looking woman. As for himself, he was chiefly remarkable for a pair of long legs, which seemed rather insecurely attached to his body, and a very marvellous laugh—a laugh which started with a gentle gurgle apparently from his toes, and burst from his lips with the roar of a Niagara. So far as

mere noise went it was admirable ; but there was never anything less mirthful. He was Captain Archibald Golightly, late of the —th Hussars, and brother to the lady with the bonnet.

The third lady—who looked about twenty-seven—had a nose which somehow suggested low comedy, and a plaintive-looking mouth. She bore a certain resemblance, particularly about the eyes, which were large, clear, and emotionless — singularly like glass marbles—to the lady in the bonnet. She was, in fact, her daughter.

“Did I hear Godfrey’s voice in the hall?” said Mrs. Golightly, as her step-son entered. She was the captain’s second wife. “Why didn’t you make him come in?”

“He’s in one of his moods,” said George—for that was the young man’s name.

“Are you speaking of Godfrey Provence?” said the lady with the bonnet. “Do tell me about him. Does there seem any prospect of his getting on?”

“He’s still writing,” said the Captain.

"He can't be doing much—one never hears of him," she said.

"Provence is aiming at rather a high standard," said George; "he is not easily contented with his work. It's the hardest thing in the world to get him to publish a line."

The young woman with the low-comedy nose looked at him gratefully from under the rim of her hat. He wondered why.

"I know the kind of thing," said the Bonnet. "Literature is all very well if you make a regular business of it, but the moment you regard it as an art, you're practically done for. We all know you'll never earn a penny."

"But Godfrey's a clever chap," said the Captain; "he must be clever, you know, Sarah—everybody says so."

"What's the use of being clever if you're never heard of?" said Sarah, who was no other than Lady Hemingway, widow of Sir James Hemingway, Baronet.

"Well, of course, his style is what they call severe," said the Captain; "he's got the artistic temperament, and writes rather above the heads of ordinary folk."

"There's a good deal of human nature in him all the same," put in George.

Lady Hemingway looked suspicious. She was not at all sure that human nature was proper: she was certain it was not well-bred: in connection with the artistic temperament it was even alarming.

"Does he write things one could have on one's drawing-room table?" she said. "I consider that is the true test of a book—would one wish to have it in one's drawing-room?"

"His article in last month's *Waverley* was beautiful," said her daughter, who blushed painfully after she had spoken.

"Grace reads all the learned Reviews," explained Lady Hemingway; "she goes in for Higher Education, you know. But," she went on, "does Godfrey make much by his writing? That is the point. I know he has his mother's two hundred and fifty, but no one could call that an income. He'll have to marry money—so far as I can see."

"I'm afraid he wouldn't do that," said Mrs. Golightly; "he has very peculiar views about marriage. You

see Constance brought him up almost entirely herself. I think he would marry a girl without a penny, if he took a fancy to her."

"How wrong to bring up a boy with such notions," said Lady Hemingway, "and after her own bitter experience."

"She lived very happily with her husband, you know," said Mrs. Golightly. "I really think they were attached to each other—quite to the end. Don't you find that artists, and musicians, and literary people seem to feel more than those with more—well, more everyday pursuits?"

"Their feelings are always getting them into trouble, I know that," said Lady Hemingway, "and they are generally dreadfully poor. Look at Constance!"

"She never seemed to mind her poverty," said Mrs. Golightly; "she bore it quite happily. Sometimes—it sounds ridiculous—I almost envied her, although I can assure you—but pray don't let it go further—it was very seldom they could afford a joint for dinner."

"She brought it all on herself," said Lady Hemingway; "with her

figure she might have married very well indeed. By the bye, does Godfrey resemble his mother?"

The Captain shook his head mournfully. "He's an ugly chap," he said, "but you get used to him—I'll say that."

"Ah!" said Lady Hemingway, "Grace never told me that. She has met him several times at 'At Homes,' and at one thing and another. All I could get out of her was that he had a nice voice and looked powerful—which of course would apply to a coal-heaver."

Every one looked at Grace, who again blushed.

"I should like to be kind to him," continued Lady Hemingway, "because of poor darling Constance. I will send him a card for my Thursdays. Men are always useful."

"Godfrey doesn't shine in society," said the Captain, "and it's mere waste to put a good dinner before him."

"What a strange thing! And his father was such a gentlemanly man!" said Lady Hemingway.

"Godfrey's rum," observed the Captain.

"He's a dear fellow when you know him," said Mrs. Golightly; "of course he can be very trying, but he's so kind if one has a headache!"

"Poets have always a touch of the molly-coddle," said her sister-in-law. Then she rose, murmured she must be going, and kissed the air at an angle of forty-five degrees from Mrs. Golightly's cheek. "Good-bye, dear," she said; "don't forget the 24th, and bring your music. People are singing a lot of Schubert just now—all in German, you know. German is so quaint. And you haven't given me Godfrey's address," she added.

"Twelve, Achilles Villas, Shepherd's Bush," said the Captain.

"Shepherd's Bush!" said Lady Hemingway; "you must mean Bedford Park. There are some quite well-known literary people there—the sort who sometimes ask you to dinner."

"Godfrey is at Shepherd's Bush," repeated the Captain, gloomily.

"How dreadful! Pray don't tell

any one outside the family," and with more adieux and more murmurings about the 24th, she and her daughter went out.

Harriet Golightly watched them drive away in their brougham.

"She might offer to take me for a turn in the Park occasionally," she said.

"Sarah's a selfish cat," said the Captain, "and always was. But she'd give all she's worth for your head of hair."

His wife did not find this speech so consoling as he had hoped.

"They make wigs wonderfully well now," she said, "and they keep up ever so much better than one's own hair."

"Is Sarah what you'd call well-preserved?" said the Captain, after a pause. "It's quite two years since I've seen her, and I fancy she's gone off."

"She looks every day of her age," said Harriet, "and that must be fifty—for she's older than Constance."

"Poor Connie!" sighed Archibald, "she *was* a fool to marry that old drybones Provence."

"Your family need not have cut

her for it, all the same," said his wife. "I have always thought—and I would say it with my dying breath—that she was treated very badly."

"I don't know about that," said Archibald; "we were all very well brought up and accustomed to good society—you must own it was rather a come-down to have her marry a foreigner, and a professional into the bargain. The man actually gave lessons; and you may say what you like, but at that time that was considered—well—an inferior sort of thing to do."

"He was a gentleman by birth," said Harriet; "you can't deny that."

"I don't believe much in French families," said her husband; "no one ever knows anything about 'em so far as I can make out. Every beastly little Frenchman one meets can't be descended from the lost Dauphin or the Huguenots. I call it dan cheek on their part to expect an educated Englishman to believe it. Besides, what's a Huguenot? I thought most of 'em were chopped up."

"Don't," said his wife.

"I dare say Provence was all right—

I hope so, at all events, for the sake of the family."

"He was an interesting-looking man."

"Interesting! Yes, I suppose women would call a man like that—all eyes and baggy trousers—interesting."

"Poor creature! Well, he's dead now, and so is Constance."

"Gawd knows what's to become of Godfrey. What with genius from his father—(thank Gawd I'm not a genius!)—and any amount of moon-struck sentimentality from his mother he's pretty sure to come to grief. What do you say, George?"

"Well," said George, "in a crisis, some of the Golightly common sense might come to the rescue."

But here the dinner-gong sent the good Captain's thoughts into another and more congenial channel.

"Do I smell grouse?" said he; "because I particularly wanted those birds to hang for another ten days."

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II.

“MY search for new worlds,” wrote Provence to George Golightly a few days later, “begins at this small village — not a hundred miles from Charing Cross—which I have named the End of All Things. It is described on local guide-posts as Little Speenham. There is a church, a public-house, and a dissenting chapel—one evil brings another—and the rustic maid abounds; a creature of large feet, wide smiles, and limited innocence. This, however, in parenthesis. My quarters might be worse, and are as comfortable as a respectable woman with an unnecessary husband, a voracious child and a barn-yard can make them. When she is not feeding the husband and

stirring pap for the babe she mixes pabulum for the pigs : in her leisure she does the washing and prepares food for me. What an existence ! The other day I asked her if she did not think that the five wise may have lived to envy the five foolish virgins. She looked at me—as only a woman can look—and mournfully winked ! No heroine flopping in elegant collapse and disillusion could match the eloquence of that wink. Sublime !

“ I can step from my room on to a lawn where yellow ducklings, a lame hen and some middle-aged cats gambol in imperfect amiability ; beyond the lawn, through a gate, is a duck-pond—you walk a little way and behold ! another gate—it is generally open—you pass through and find yourself in the poultry-yard. This yard is by no means un instructive, and lacks but one thing to reach Nineteenth Century civilization—the Divorce Court. I must not forget the kitchen-garden—rich with gooseberry bushes, mignonette, apple trees and potatoes ; odorous with world-weary cabbage and patent fertilizer. A modern Eden, with a dash of the commonplace, and a clothes line

extended from the Tree of Knowledge to the Tree of Life ; Eve with a bad complexion and no figure—or too much—to speak of, scrubs the kitchen floor and has small leisure for the Tempter ; Satan (your obedient servant) loses himself in a vast yawn and is certainly in no mood to tempt ; whilst Adam snores the sleep of the unphilosophic, the robust and the over-fed, on the kitchen chair bedstead. To write country idylls one should live in town. . . .

“The air now is delightful—fresh-washed by yesterday’s rain and dried by this morning’s sun. What a Queen of Washerwomen is Nature ! That is a prosaic simile, I know, but it suits my surroundings. It is only a journalist or a genius who can write of ambrosia with his mouth full, nay, poor devil, perhaps only half full, of porridge. I shall try and endure this for a week. Shall I ever learn to bear gracefully what is good for me ? ever feel—on the analogy of Virtue being its own reward (a darksome saying *en passant*)—that the Uncomfortable, the Irsome, the Infinitely Tedious and all the phases of Dead-levelism are better for me than

all the other things (thank Heaven, we may leave them to the imagination) which I am not desperate enough—yet—to hope for? But—it is encouraging to remember that there are few things in life which do not sooner or later admit a But—I have had an adventure. This noon I started for a walk over the common with its big board of bye-laws (lame in the leg but awful with penalties) and on to the high road. Then, for no other reason than my constitutional love for the crooked, I branched off into a winding lane. I must have walked ten minutes or more when I suddenly found myself facing a gate : curiosity or my guardian angel prompted me to look over it. I saw a small, old-fashioned garden, a broad, flat house of the bungalow type, and a girl sitting on the lawn. At first I noticed that she was bored and what women call untidy ; then that she was mysteriously, surprisingly, uncomfortably beautiful. I suppose I stared too hard—she looked up, caught my eye, blushed, tugged her dress, which was certainly short, over her ankles and tried to smooth her hair ; for she wore no hat. Well, it was

clearly impossible for me to stand any longer at the gate; it was equally impossible for me to walk away—at least from my point of view. I took off my hat, endeavoured to look innocent, and touched the gate. *L'inconnue* rose from her chair, and with one more tug at her gown walked towards me. 'I beg your pardon,' said I, 'but can you direct me to East Sheerwell? I think I have lost my way.' She began to smile, and looked steadily beyond me. 'You are quite in the wrong direction,' she said; 'East Sheerwell is ten miles from here and lies at your back.' I thanked her, took off my hat again, and went on my way rejoicing. Is that all? you will say. Have I not used the word 'rejoicing,' and applied it to myself? Don't laugh at me—I am laughing at myself enough for both of us.—Yours, G. P.

"P.S.—I have forgotten something. Whom should I meet at the station the day I came down but old Heathcote—the Honourable and Reverend. Do you remember him? It appears he has exchanged rectories with the local apostle, and is down here with Lady Theodosia Gore-Jones and his

two daughters. He insisted that I should dine with them to-morrow and stay over Sunday. I have never met any of the women, but they are 'fond of music,' and 'read a little Greek—in a girlish way.' God be merciful to me a sinner! He also introduced me to a lady he was very much assisting into a chariot and pair—an elderly person who shows me what the British Matron might have been before she was shocked. Her name is Cargill, and her husband is a baronet. Into what distinguished company have I fallen! You may depend the devil is not far off in *this* wilderness."

When Provence had finished this letter he gave it to his landlady for the post-boy, and left the house with the air of a man who had some more definite object in view than a mild jostling for the digestion. It was evening—perhaps nine o'clock, and that peculiar stillness reigned over all things which in the country marks the closing in of day. The moon was bright, the air fresh. Provence felt that he had every excuse for tingling with the joy of being

alive, and that his scepticism for one night at least might be the light scum on a deep surface of sentimentality and unspoken quotations from the poets. For one moment he was tempted to think he might lapse into poetry himself: that is to say, if his thoughts would only shape themselves into something more definite than a variety of agreeable impressions which would no more bear analysis—much less the writing on paper—than the sheen of the moon on the duck-pond. Meanwhile he walked on, gradually quickening his steps until he reached the winding lane he had already explored that morning. Then he slackened his pace, and with the not unpleasant consciousness that he was behaving more youngly than he had ever imagined possible in his youth, he smiled kindly at his own folly till he gained a green gate. Here he stopped short, for She was standing there, a vision of loveliness and white muslin—a fair enough sight to make any man's heart (provided that the cook and the counting-house had not reduced that organ to an inferior kind of liver) stand still. She did not seem surprised to see

him, but with an indescribable movement of grace and confidence leant a little further over the gate, looked him straight in the eyes for a bewildering moment, and—looked away. The girl was no doubt, as Provence had said in his letter, uncomfortably beautiful: attractive with a beauty which other women might or might not admire, but would at all events rather not see in a rival. There were faults in her face. The chin, in spite of its dimple, might have been rounder, her mouth with all its fresh redness was a little too wavering, her eyebrows were a shade too straight. She had wonderful hair, neither auburn, nor gold, nor brown, but a suggestion of all three; brown eyes, with the unclouded frankness of a shallow pond—putting aside the unpleasant reflection that a shallow pond may be deceptive; a skin of unusual fairness, and a poise of the head which was positively royal—royal in that sense which, in spite of human experience, human sentiment with that longing to idealize the real—(a longing which, by the bye, is more apt to show itself in definitions than deeds)—would fain give the word. In

form she was tall and slender—rather too slender, perhaps, for statuesque symmetry. 2368

But before Provence could persuade himself that there was a something in her expression which did not at all events forbid him to draw nearer, a window was heard to open, and a loud voice, feminine, aristocratic, and shrill, drowned the sweetness of the nightingale, "Cynthia! Cynthia!"

The girl sighed, smiled with ineffable graciousness on heaven and earth, glanced at the mortal on the opposite side of the road, and disappeared in the shadow of the garden. Provence felt that the night had grown dark.

But the moon was still shining upon the duckpond.





III.

“**Y**OUR father is most extraordinary,” said Lady Theodosia to her niece, as they sat together on the lawn next morning. “He has invited a man to dinner this evening—a person who writes—and I am told nothing about it till this eleventh hour. Meanwhile I have given all my orders for the day, and Johnny has driven in to market. Your father cannot realize that I have other interests in life besides housekeeping. If I died to-morrow he would expect me to soar into heaven with the store-cupboard on my back.”

Lady Theodosia Gore-Jones, third daughter of the Earl of Drumdrosset and widow of the late Admiral Sir Clyfford Gore-Jones, K.C.B., was

rather above the average height, with a plump figure which her male acquaintance were wont to describe as "deuced neat." She had very black hair, which she wore parted in the middle and gathered in a knot at the nape of her neck. This simple fashion suited her admirably, and had proved useful on more than one occasion, for it is certainly difficult to believe hard things of a woman who looks like a *Sainte Nitouche*—in profile. Her nose was small and delicate—an eminently lady-like nose, with curved nostrils: her lips were thin, red, and firmly set—in her own idea chaste, in her late husband's, vixenish. Her skin—for a woman who owned to two and forty—was remarkably clear and fine.

"Who is the man?" said Cynthia.

"His name is Provence. I have heard of the creature—he is an Egyptologist, or a Dissenter, or something equally disagreeable. Heaven knows what the wretch talks about! I wonder if your father has a short, condensed sort of thing about Egypt in his library—one of those convenient books you can get up in half an hour. I cannot imagine what Percival sees in these learned, un-

comfortable people—one never knows what to give them for dinner, they have such miserable digestions. . . . Of course—I knew there was something else. He wants me to ask the Cargills over to help the matter through. It is outrageous at such short notice. Your father has no notion of etiquette.”

“And what is etiquette, after all?” said her niece.

“Etiquette, my dear, makes the difference between Man and the Brute Beast,” and with that Lady Theodosia hurried—for she was energetic—into the house.

Cynthia waited till she had gone, and then moved her chair in a more direct line with her father’s study, which led by French windows on to the lawn. She could then see him at his table. It was the Rector’s day for writing his sermon. He was a man who liked system in all things: first because it was philosophical; secondly—and perhaps, in common with many theorists, his secondly was the salt of the whole—he had an idea that it was a nice, gentlemanly sort of thing to cultivate. But although the Hon. and Rev. Percival Heathcote could

control his actions, his thoughts were amenable only to the impulse of the moment. Now impulsiveness formed the strongest element in his character; the fact, therefore, that every Thursday morning at ten o'clock found him at his study table, and the further fact that his entire household was wrapped in stillness from that hour till luncheon time, lest a sound should stem the current of his eloquence, merely resulted in this:—if there was a day in the week when the sermon was *not* written, Thursday was that day. Only one person in the world, knew this, however, and that was his daughter Cynthia. She, too, like her father, was impulsive, but she—seeing that she was a woman—saw no need to cultivate much besides her own will. "System," she once told her father, "is an excellent thing if one has no spirit, but spirit will accomplish in five minutes what system cannot do in as many centuries." Her father looked grave and shook his head, but loved her the more. He explained this apparent inconsistency to himself as the natural tenderness of a shepherd for the wandering lamb.

On this particular morning the

Rector had taken his chair as usual, arranged his blotting-pad at precisely the right angle, drawn six sheets of writing paper from his desk, dipped his pen into the ink, and—looked through the open window and beyond the green lawn, and beyond that again to a garden seat where Cynthia—Cynthia in a cotton gown and a surprising hat, which the Rector, in his innocence, supposed was the fashion—sat with her aunt. He sighed, dipped his pen in the ink once more, and wrote his text very neatly at the top of his first sheet—*“It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing.”* Then he looked up again, and beheld Lady Theodosia moving towards the kitchen garden. He hesitated a few moments—or was he merely waiting till she was out of sight?—and finally walked to the window and whistled—softly, but with the ease and tunefulness of an accomplished whistler—the opening bars of a Chopin Nocturne. Cynthia lifted her head and laughed. It was a curious laugh, and meant all manner of things: among others, good health, considerable wickedness, and a fellow-feeling

for the ungodly. She left her book—for she had been reading—and came towards him.

"It is a pity," she said, coming in at the window and seating herself in a low armchair, "that it is your sermon day, or we might have had some music."

There was just a shade of amiable malice in her tone. The Rector looked wistful. He had a nice touch for Chopin.

"I suppose Agatha is at home?" he said.

Agatha was his eldest daughter and the mainstay of his parish. He was, perhaps, somewhat afraid of Agatha, but she copied his sermons in a beautiful hand, was an adept at hunting references, and simply unequalled at tying a cravat.

"Yes, Agatha is at home," said Cynthia.

"I wonder if she is going out," sighed the Rector, allowing his fingers to wander Chopin-wise on the writing-table.

"She is designing morning-gowns for the poor heathen," said Cynthia. "She certainly won't stir out of the house to-day. But we can talk."

The Rector dropped his pen, stretched out his long, elegant legs, and leant back in his chair. He experienced a strange delight in hearing gossip, or talking it, on Thursdays.

"I want you to tell me," began Cynthia, "about the man who is coming to dinner. What does Aunt Theodosia mean by calling him an Egyptologist?"

"Provence the Egyptologist has been dead for years—this man is his son. To tell the truth, I don't know much about him, except that he is by way of being literary. I think he once wrote a poem—a pretty enough thing about despair and the soul and the function of art. Just what one would expect from the son of a French *savant* and an English woman with yearnings. His father—Professor Provence—was a very singular character, and had all manner of theories about women and the state of Ireland and papyri. The mother was one of the Golightlys—very decent family too: she was something of the British maid and a good deal of the *enfant terrible* when she married. I remember the marriage created a small sensation at the time; they

were foolish enough to elope, and she was cut by her family. You see, Provence had no private income; he depended entirely on what he earned, and the Golightlys could hardly be expected to smile at an alliance of that kind—especially as he earned very little.”

“But where did you meet the man who is coming to dinner?” said Cynthia.

“Dobbs introduced him to me,” said the Rector—“Dobbs of *The Present Age*. He thinks a lot of him—calls him the ‘makings of a success,’ and pays him for his contributions with something approaching liberality. Of course I could hardly do less than ask him to dinner when I met him at the station the other night. He is down for his health—been overworking, I suppose. God knows what he works at; even Dobbs admits that he has very little to show for his promise. In case he’s a trifle dull, I have asked the Cargills to come as well.”

“Edward is so dull himself,” said Cynthia.

“I don’t know so much about that,” said the Rector. “Edward is

a man of sound common sense and good-wearing, everyday ability. I have always thought you were too severe in your judgment of Edward."

Mr. Heathcote, in spite of his touch for Chopin and fine eye for water-colours, was sufficiently of this world to see that it would not be altogether amiss if Cynthia could be brought to regard with some kindness the son of his neighbour Sir James Cargill. He knew that independence and force of will like hers were scarcely fitted to the married state; was well aware, moreover, that her force was wholly beyond the range of mathematical calculations—her impetuosity, a decided wilfulness, and a fatal obstinacy rendered her moods peculiarly various: if she married at all, her husband should not be too much given to mental analysis. Now Edward Cargill was the son of a rich baronet, was a man of quiet tastes and iron nerves. He held few opinions, and these were of the general-principles order; he thought the natural instincts extremely natural, and had no Theory of Life beyond that of taking the world as he found it. He could sympathize with A, who pulled

down temples, and admire B, who raised them up again, but he never gave more than a smile—and perhaps a guinea subscription—to either. Thus he was an extremely forbearing, mild-tempered young fellow, who struck the Rector as peculiarly adapted to a woman of Cynthia's disposition. It was a patent truth that Edward was only too anxious to prove his adaptability: Cynthia alone was inscrutable, gloomy, and reserved in the matter.

"I detest sound common sense," said that young lady, in reply to her father's remark, "particularly in Edward. Beef and common sense and Edward are to me synonymous terms. What a capital husband he would make Agatha!"

"My dear child, that is a little unkind," said the Rector, with a curious twitch of his upper lip. "Agatha is a dear, good girl—far too good for any ordinary man. If you really think that Edward is so utterly uninteresting, why should you be willing to couple his name with your sister's?"

Cynthia's eyes began to dance. "Because," she said, "he is so tremendously appreciative, and Agatha

likes to be appreciated. If I married, I should want to do some of the appreciating myself; it would be just possible for Agatha to forego that luxury."

At that moment a footstep was heard outside, the door opened, and Agatha herself walked into the room. She was very tall and slim—decidedly elegant. Next to her elegance one would notice her placidity. Then in their order one would naturally admire her blue eyes, her pink and white skin, and her beautiful smooth braids of yellow hair. She started a little—ever so little, of course—as her eyes fell on Cynthia's hat, but her smile, which was sweet, patient, and habitual, never wavered.

"I am sorry to interrupt your work, papa," she began. The Rector looked confused, and dipped his pen with immense energy into the ink-pot. "But Aunt Theodosia has asked me to tell you that she has heard from Lady Cargill, and they are all coming."

"What on earth shall I wear?" said Cynthia. "I wonder whether I can make something between now and seven."

"Your clothes are always in such sad need of repair," said Agatha. "If you remember, I begged you to get a new dinner-dress weeks ago. I think, though, we need not trouble papa with these small matters."

The Rector blamed himself for wishing that Agatha were a shade less respectful and considerate. He could scarcely admit to his own conscience—much less confide the melancholy truth to his eldest daughter—that he was more in the mood for discussing gowns than writing a sermon. But such indeed was the case. He dimly felt that there were disadvantages in living with a creature who had too keen a sense of duty and the fitness of things.

"I am glad for your sake, papa, that they can come," said Agatha, sweetly; "it will be such a complete change for you after your hard morning."

The Hon. and Rev. gentleman glanced nervously at the blank sheet before him and the "*It is the spirit that quickeneth: the flesh profiteth nothing.*"

"Yes," he said, "it will be pleasant, certainly."

Agatha moved to the door and held it open for a few seconds, hoping that Cynthia would accept the hint and leave the Rector in peace. But Cynthia never stirred.

"Are you coming, dear," said Agatha, with the merest touch of reproach in her voice.

"I was just thinking," said Cynthia, dreamily, "how hideous I shall look in my old Pongee!" But she followed her sister out of the room.

Provence, meanwhile, by discreet questioning had learnt from his landlady that the flat house was the Rectory: that the Rector's daughters were considered beauties: that their names were respectively Miss Agatha and Miss Cynthia: that Miss Agatha was a good, Christian young lady: that Miss Cynthia was fascinating but not altogether what a clergyman's daughter ought to be. She was too gay-hearted, and never joined in the hymns at church. He longed to ask more, but was afraid lest he might seem over-interested, so he changed the subject with unnecessary haste to market-gardening, and listened patiently, if unhappily, to a long account of potato blight.

He found himself at the Rectory gate that evening with a large and entirely new kindliness in his heart for the whole human race, and a generous (and also new) tolerance for human failings in general. It seemed to him that so far as life was concerned the darkness was made light and the crooked straight. To feel this and yet not know why he felt it was delightful and sufficient. This mood, however, did not last—possibly because Cynthia was not in sight, probably because he was a man whose passion for analysis would make him pick a rainbow to pieces. The horrid suspicion seized him that he might be deceiving himself—that he was not after all so anxious to see his newly-found goddess—that he had not in reality been counting the hours since he had first seen her till the time drew near to meet her again. He decided to forget—if possible—his folly and cool his disordered imagination by a rigid course of vegetable diet—that is to say when he returned to his lodgings on Monday! By this time he was not only inside the house but had his foot on the threshold of the drawing-room—he heard the hum of

several voices—he was conscious of some half-dozen figures—he saw but one. She wore a gown of less artless design than her white muslin of the night before: her hair was more fashionably arranged, there was a franker suggestion of the world, the flesh, and the devil about her whole person: her eyes gleamed with mischief, with confidence in her own beauty and again more mischief. She had been anxiously watching the door for his arrival; she knew quite well that he was the stranger of the night before—strangers were rare in Little Speenham—yet now he was present she wondered why she had wished for the meeting. She was afraid he would look too pleased to see her! The thought crossed her mind that he must be weak—and she hated weakness. A man of strong will would have struggled longer against her fascination. The mischief in her eyes died away—she felt dissatisfied with human nature. But as she approached Provence she saw that his expression was cold, even stern; she found no trace of enthusiasm in his bearing. He eyed her beauty with calm; her toilette with indifference:

his bow and smile were courteous—frigidly courteous—nothing more. At first she was relieved—then piqued—finally humiliated, but he rose mountains high in her respect. The reason for Provence's manner was briefly this: He had suddenly grown self-conscious; he had practised restraint too long to give way gracefully to the sway of impulse. To conceal his embarrassment, therefore, he had assumed an unfelt stoicism—not so much to deceive Cynthia as himself.

"I am so glad you were able to come," said Lady Theodosia. "My brother has told me so much about you that I quite feel as though we had met before in some other state—the sort of delightful thing, you know, these wicked, charming Buddhists tell us about. Or am I confusing Buddhists with Platonists?—it would be so like me. What a thing it is to be an unlearned woman!" Lady Theodosia had many methods in conversation; the artless and ignorant style she found most useful for the subjection of Elderly Science. Provence was not elderly—she was not altogether certain that he was scientific, but she classed him among

abnormals, and from her point of view it came to the same thing. "One point," she said to herself, "is a blessing. Neither of the girls could fancy a man who wore such shoes," so she left him with Cynthia and turned to Lady Cargill. The Baronet's wife was a very erect, well-covered woman about fifty or thereabouts, with a mild gaze and agreeable manners. She did not convey the irritating impression of having been a beauty in her youth, but looked as though she had been born with placid blonde hair, a *pince-nez*, and an elderly expression.

"I hope you are not delaying dinner for Edward, my dear Lady Theodosia," she said, "because that would distress him greatly. He only arrived from Speenham as we left, and of course we could not wait for him. He has been to see about the new cottages."

"Ah yes," chimed in Sir James, who stood with the Rector in front of the fireplace and concealed Lady Theodosia's careful summer arrangement of ferns, Virginia corks, and red art-pots, "my boy is becoming an idealist. Now my experience of

idealists is this—they think very high but act on the whole rather low, and make uncommonly bad landlords. I don't believe in these Oxford lads, all theory and no experience. This is an age of immature cause and premature result." Sir James had not the smallest idea of what he meant, but he thought it sounded so tersely put and so much like a leading article that he repeated it again. "Yes—immature cause and premature result. We eat the blossom in preference to the fruit, and no wonder we feel empty." (He rather prided himself on his graceful gift for metaphor). "Our universities have become mere forcing grounds to supply an unnatural appetite for the insipid and costly. Let my boy stick to his boat-club and Roman law—that's all he's good for—and leave model cottages alone. What on earth is the use of bath-rooms and patent drains to the agricultural labourer—what does *he* know about microbes?" It must not be supposed that Sir James's impassioned rhetoric was due to the inspiration of the moment: all his sentiments were darkly pondered and duly packed down into top-heavy

sentences in a Commonplace Book before he delivered them to the world. This evening, however, his discourse was interrupted by the entrance of his son—the ostensible object of his remarks. Young Cargill was undeniably well-favoured, and bore himself like a gentleman—although he lacked the air of distinction which characterized Godfrey Provence. After Lady Theodosia and the Rector had greeted him he seated himself by Cynthia, who blushed with annoyance at the undisguised admiration in his eyes. Provence, however, saw the blush and already saw himself miserably presenting congratulations at their wedding. In despair he left them together and turned to Agatha, who certainly looked extremely well in black lace and yellow roses.

“I feel I ought to ask you,” she said, “whether you found your journey down very tiresome. Our train-service is so bad, and I always think that unnecessary waste of time almost amounts to physical suffering if one has an active mind. I hope you provided yourself with books.” She had gathered from Cynthia’s

random remarks made in the intervals of dressing for dinner that Mr. Provence was a writer and probably learned. She thought that her little speech would fall agreeably on his ears—that it would be a delicate way of showing that his fame and cultured tastes were not unknown to her.

“I amused myself by looking out of the window,” he replied, innocently, “although I did just glance at a very diverting tale about a French poodle and a bishop in *The Piccadilly News*. Have you seen it?”

Agatha was too lady-like to stare, too calm to gasp, but she felt grateful to the parlour-maid for announcing dinner.

At the dinner-table, which was round for the occasion, Provence, who had taken in Lady Theodosia, found himself next to Cynthia and Edward Cargill. The more he tried to convince himself that she and Edward were desperately and mutually in love, the more beautiful and desirable she appeared. “And what can she see in him?” he thought, and took a savage pleasure in picturing Edward some twenty years hence, fat, red-faced and

heartly—the replica of his worthy father who sat opposite—the typical country-gentleman of ancient lineage, good cellar, and moderate views.

“I once read a Greek play, you know, with a crib,” Lady Theodosia was explaining, “skipping the particles, of course, and those awfully fascinating choruses. I found them too engrossing—and it does not do for a woman to get too absorbed in one particular thing. Her social duties demand that her interests should be scattered.”

Conversation wended its blithesome way through Lord Todhunter's new conservatories, paused at the disgraceful state of the high-road, brightened considerably at Farmer Drew's prize oxen, but came to a stand-still at the Future of England. Perhaps this was due to Sir James, who took a just pride in his power of concentration, and had no mind for the Future of anything, with stewed sweet-breads on his plate. The Present, with a near background of *champignons à la crème*, was all sufficient. So he relapsed into silence and the unspeakable joy of mastication. Cynthia peeped at Provence

from under her lashes. She caught his eye and found it sympathetic. In a moment the whole aspect of things was changed for both of them. Provence found a mysterious joy in being bored since she was bored too. Cynthia—more moderate in her emotions—felt that the evening might not prove so dull as she had first feared it would be. To their common satisfaction, general conversation girded up its loins once more and attacked the local County Council.

"I was listening to the nightingales when you passed last night," she said, when the Rector, and Sir James, and Lady Theodosia were fairly started on their campaign; "they have been silent for weeks."

"I thought that this part of the world was noted for its nightingales," said Provence, wondering if it was profane to admire a goddess's throat.

"I believe there is some such boast," she said; "but have you never noticed that places, like people, find their reputation—particularly if it is good—sufficiently useful without the fatigue of living up to it?" Provence did not see the highest type of feminine excellence in the Miltonian

Eve, but he thought a woman should believe easily. In Cynthia's case he began to fear that this bewitching characteristic was entirely absent.

"I see you are a cynic," he said.

"Oh no," she said, quickly, "I haven't got a label. I'm afraid I'm too much guided by what somebody—I forget who—calls a 'feeling in the bones,' to make a pretence to the feeblest kind of philosophy." Then she sighed. "Don't you think," she said, with an expression of touching simplicity, "it would be much easier to be good if we left everything to our instincts? Reason—what learned people call reason—seems so much more artificial."

Provence felt an admiration for that feminine daring which will rush in where a bishop might fear to tread, but his mental habits did not allow him to answer her in a hurry. He had his own ideas on the subject, no doubt, but would have required several sheets of foolscap on which to express them—inadequately and with the meaning between the lines.

"You are plunging into deep water," he said, "and that is dangerous." This he was well aware

was just what any one else might have said. The thought was irritating, since, for some reason, he was extremely anxious to appear rather different from the ordinary diner-out—to her. He did not think himself different, nor did he have the mean ambition to seem what he was not; he only knew that if he could find favour in her sight even in a small degree—and he had heard that women in their delicious generosity could, under given conditions, discover what was best in a man when the majority of his fellows saw little but the indifferent—it would be something to find courage in.

“Do you know,” said Cynthia, suddenly, “I made sure I should see you again—when you asked me the way to East Sheerwell yesterday?”

This was probably the most unstudied remark she had made that evening—for she found few things more difficult than giving herself to the world, as it were, unvarnished. The strongest element in her character was that which, for want of a better name, we may call the histrionic instinct. Life to her was a

series of situations in which she invariably figured as the heroine—a heroine who was always charming and graceful, with feeling enough to be interesting but not enough to be tiresome. If she wept she was careful to dry her eyes before they grew red—if she laughed it was to show her exquisite teeth, for her sense of humour was more grim than merry; if she talked nonsense, but looked the key to all philosophies, especially those of earth, as she did that evening, she felt she was playing Juliet—a Juliet who had travelled and was the niece of Lady Theodosia, for the bewilderment of a Romeo who, though no longer a youth and certainly not possessed of the romantic air, had at all events a well-built figure, considerable fire in his eyes, and was the “makings of a success.” Juliet was a *rôle* she could rarely indulge in, nor indeed was it a *rôle* she particularly cared for. It was so hard to find a Romeo worth playing to! With a woman’s quickness she saw that Provence was a man of unusual refinement and delicate feeling—he would never take too much for granted. She promised herself some

excitement in finding the limit to his self-restraint.

Edward Cargill, meantime, began to feel hardly used. He, after all, had led Cynthia into dinner, and she had not addressed him directly once, except to ask his opinion of that year's growth of asparagus. Agatha had, no doubt, done her best to atone for her sister's want of manners, and had expressed her views with much propriety and no little erudition on the recent excavations in Asia Minor, to which Edward had replied that excavating and exploring were awfully jolly for those who liked them, but he didn't like them. Here Sir James came puffing to the rescue by inquiring—certainly with some want of relevance—whether any more boys in the church choir were down with the influenza. Nor did he stop there—for the choir reminded him of music, and music reminded him of an article he had read that morning on the increased importation of cat-gut. Cat-gut very naturally suggested cats, and cats brought the Egyptians—whom he had quite forgotten—to his mind. And Lady Theodosia had carefully mentioned in her note that

the new man was an Egyptologist. Egypt was plainly *the* topic of all others for general discussion. He commenced with a loud cough: "Now as to the Egyptians!" he began. The company looked bewildered but attentive. "Now as to the Egyptians. They are an interesting race, if you like." Here he looked at Provence and smiled encouragingly. "I can fully understand a man devoting his life and energy to a close study of their immense Past. I don't pretend to know much about it myself," he added, with magnificent modesty, "it is naturally matter for the specialist; but in a quiet way and in one's library of a morning, I say one would be—well—one would be an ass not to feel a certain amount of awe at the antiquity of the Pyramids." Then he stared so very hard at Provence that he felt constrained to make some remark.

"I fear," he said, "that indifference as to the Past of Egypt is far more common than you suppose. You, no doubt, have studied the subject seriously."

"Merely as a *dilettante*," said Sir James, lightly, "the merest *dilet-*

tante." As he had spent some twenty-five minutes that morning skipping through "Egypt" in the Encyclopædia, he felt that in describing himself as a *dilettante* he had, if anything, underrated his knowledge. To what lengths the ingenuous gentleman would have carried his discourse it is impossible to say; but as Mr. Heathcote's conscience did not allow him to indulge in sleeve-laughter at a guest's expense—particularly when that guest was an estimable, kind-hearted man who owned the finest peach-houses in the county and was a liberal subscriber to the parish charities—he determined to set matters right.

"Sir James is taking it for granted that you have inherited your father's tastes," he said, and looked at Provence with a meaning smile.

"Then I must own at once that I have not," said Provence. "I may not even call myself, with Sir James, a *dilettante* in the study of Egyptology. I have read everything my father wrote, but my interest has been mainly personal—that is to say, I thought more of the writer than the thing written about."

Cynthia was here just a little reminded of her own attitude towards her father's sermons.

"Then," said Sir James, surprise mingling with relief on his radiant countenance, "you are not an Egyptologist, after all!" Provence could not imagine why Lady Theodosia looked so much happier and begged him to take more cream with his strawberries. It was the first time she had really smiled on him since his arrival.

When the women returned to the drawing-room, Agatha expressed a fear that their new acquaintance was a trifle superficial, and certainly a little harsh—she would not say disrespectful—when he referred to his father's noble contributions to learning.

"I don't agree with you," said Cynthia, who was still thinking of the sermons.

"I may be mistaken, dear," murmured Agatha; "it is best not to be over-positive, one way or the other, in judging others. He is not at all bad-looking—for a clever man. I dare say some people would call him handsome, in a peculiar way."

"I should never dream of calling him even passable," said Cynthia, who was perhaps in a teasing mood. "There is a certain refinement about his face, and his eyes are intelligent and rather a nice colour. His mouth has a great deal of character, although it has a suggestion of weakness. His nose and chin suit the rest of him well enough, and there may be a sort of—well, classic grace about his head."

"I didn't notice all that," said Agatha, softly.

"I was sitting next to him, you must remember," said Cynthia, with a cold voice and hot cheeks.

"Well," said Lady Theodosia, "at any rate he seems a pleasant, gentlemanly man, and, I should say, very easy to amuse. It is an immense comfort to find that he is an ordinary mortal with the usual tastes. I wonder if he likes marrow-bones—we might have them for luncheon to-morrow."

"Since he is such an inoffensive person," chimed in Lady Cargill, "I wish dear Edward would take to him. I sometimes fear that he finds home a little dull after Cambridge. Cam-

bridge must be so cheerful." Lady Cargill had married young, and had spent her life—with the exception of a few brief days at the Great Exhibition, a tour round the Lakes, and a trip to Switzerland—at Northwold Hall, her husband's country seat. An imaginary heart-affection was her excuse for avoiding the gaieties of London and a town house; and as her accomplishments, besides playing "The Minstrel Boy" (with variations) on the piano, lay in the direction of her household and the care of other women's babies, it was perhaps just as well that she confined her calls and advice within a six-mile radius. "For some reasons," she continued, after a pause, "I should not be sorry to see my dear boy engaged to a suitable person." She glanced at Agatha as she spoke, for although she was timidly attached to Cynthia, she was only seized with nervous palpitation when, in nightmares, she beheld her as the possible mistress of Northwold Hall and the model dairy. Besides, putting aside all other considerations, she had a firm conviction that true refinement and good breeding found their only outward and

visible expression in sloping shoulders, a straight, thin nose, and an extremely high forehead. Agatha possessed all these qualifications—Cynthia none of them. But Agatha was turning over the leaves of the *Classical Review* when Lady Cargill spoke, and if she saw the look she did not appear to understand its significance. When, however, Edward came into the room a few minutes later, she smiled at him so prettily that even his mother thought him an oaf for not betraying a little rapture. As it was, he seemed decidedly gloomy, and after threading his way rather aimlessly among the numerous bandy-legged chairs and squat tables which Lady Theodosia had purchased by post through the inspiriting catalogue of an *Art Furnisher*, he settled himself near Cynthia.

"We were just saying, my boy," said Lady Cargill, with the unconscious guile of a perfectly truthful woman, "how agreeably surprised we are in this Mr. Provence." Edward did not look so overjoyed as he might have done at this piece of intelligence.

"Aunt Theodosia is so rejoiced to

find that he is not learned," said Agatha, "and really I cannot imagine how we all managed to get such a mistaken idea of his knowledge. The moment I spoke to him I felt the incongruity between his reputation and—well, his way of expressing himself generally."

Edward could be jealous and could lose his temper, but he was not mean-spirited. "Oh, well," he said, "I dare say he knows a lot, only where should we be if he jawed on big things?" Cynthia liked him so much for this that she looked him straight in the face and smiled—an action which made so much difference to Edward, that he felt almost compensated for her behaviour at dinner.

"I think we might have some music, Cynthia," said the Rector, who entered at that moment, followed by Sir James and Provence, the former of whom had detained them in the conservatory to dilate on the merits of his new head-gardener and some freshly imported guano.

Cynthia went to the piano, and played with much passion and bewildering inaccuracy the noisiest of the *Rhapsodies Hongroises*. Her enthu-

siasm and easy familiarity with the loud pedal were almost professional. Until she had finished her remarkable performance Provence held his breath and all but wished himself away. Then he forgot everything—even her want of culture (as *he* understood it, that is to say, for culture of a sort was a stalled ox at the Rectory) and the wrong notes—in contemplating the beautiful flush which followed her exertions. In common with many who are wise by profession and not a few who are similarly gifted by nature, Provence's wisdom was of far greater service to his friends—when they would avail themselves of it—than to himself. His discernment in reading character, which belonged rather to an almost feminine instinct than to academic logic, and was part of his literary faculty, was completely overbalanced in the case of Cynthia by the strong personal magnetism she had possessed for him from the first. To have discovered the force of physical attraction was a fact in itself so engrossing that all other considerations were, if not forgotten, at least permitted to slumber. Even as she played he was vaguely conscious that

she revealed much of her own nature in that strange blending of force and uncertainty with which she rendered music. To have felt this, no matter how dimly, was a step towards imperfect vision. He could never be completely blind. He had no further opportunity to speak with Cynthia that evening, for Edward never left her side. So, obeying his artistic instinct to study, at all hazards, something, he turned to Agatha. He felt bound to admit that this young lady was extremely pretty and plumbable. That is to say, he found no difficulty in reading her amiable character and learning her humbly expressed, feminine, and correct opinions. He did not always agree with her, it is true, but as she never by any possible chance thought anything which was not endorsed by at least two clearly recognized authorities, the cause rested with his idiosyncrasies and not her ignorance. Their differences, therefore, could never be otherwise than polite: he was not at all sure from his brief experience of Cynthia that he could promise so much where she was concerned. To begin with, she, too, had idiosyncrasies, and it is

assuredly more difficult to maintain one's equanimity in argument with a young woman whose chief aim in discussion is to prove that somebody, though not herself, must be a fool, than with an intelligent, well-read lady who squeaks musically with touching self-effacement under the colossal mask of Carlyle or Browning.

"That Provence is a very decent fellow," said the Rector, when the Cargills had departed, Provence had been shown to his room, and Lady Theodosia had retired to her bed; "he is a great improvement on his father." Agatha opened her china-blue eyes and wondered whether she ought not to mention the French poodle and the bishop.

"I don't think I like him," said Cynthia; "he has a way of speaking meekly and looking aggressive. I wonder if he is conceited."

"My dear," said the Rector, "I never saw a man—a man, that is to say, of his ability—who was less of the egoist."

"At all events," said Cynthia, "you must own he is hard to get at. I believe he has a pasha-like contempt for women."

"That never struck me," said Agatha. "I should say he was much too apathetic to have a contempt for anything."

"Apathetic! I should never call you a good judge of faces, Agatha. He probably feels too much—not too little. There is a feminine sensitiveness about his mouth."

"I understood you to say his mouth was weak, when we were talking after dinner." Cynthia was certainly provoking.

"Is not feminine sensitiveness something like weakness, in a man?" said Cynthia. "I don't see that I have contradicted myself."

It was not until she found herself in the solitude of her own bedroom that the uncomfortable consciousness seized her of not having been pleasant. She was a long time undressing, and tried to make peace with her conscience by dwelling on Agatha's tiresome habit of magnifying details. "For instance," she said to herself, "if Agatha were the Creator she would make her beetles all legs and no body. One would think there was nothing of Mr. Provence but a mouth." But even then she

was not happy, and when her head was fairly aching with sophistry (emphasized by the hair-brush) she marched into Agatha's room, which adjoined her own. The gentle Agatha was already in bed and asleep.

"Agatha," said Cynthia, tapping her shoulder enthusiastically with the bristle-side of her weapon. "Agatha, are you awake?"

Agatha started with pain, and opening her eyes, stared at her sister with something curiously resembling wrath. "I *was* not awake," she said.

"I only wanted to tell you," said Cynthia, "that I have been a Beast this evening. I am sorry," and then she returned—with the proud sorrow of a fallen angel in her expression—to her own apartment.





IV.

WHEN Cynthia made her appearance at breakfast the next morning, Provence thought she looked the picture of heavenly meekness—but for the spark of inextinguishable fire in her eyes. She wore, too, a white cotton gown of severe simplicity—a simplicity, however, which did full justice to her figure. It was not till long afterwards that he remembered how, from the first day he had seen her, her clothes always seemed part of her nature; how her gowns, her hats, her very slippers and tortoiseshell hairpins, betrayed her mood no less than her eyes—certainly more than her beautiful, misleading mouth. She greeted Provence with an old-fash-

ioned dignity which made him feel almost as though he were meeting her for the first time. He thought of her manner in the garden on that delicious evening when she looked unutterable things at the sky and assembled nature: he would not decide on which occasion she was most interesting.

Cynthia, meanwhile, who appeared to be deeply absorbed in her father's discourse on the tendency of modern poetry, was in reality criticising Provence as she had never criticised him before and would never criticise him again. It was a peculiar process, and she would have called it "making up her mind" about him. It happened he was looking his best; and, ignominious as the thought may be, who can deny that the whole tenor of a life may often depend on the mere turning in or out of one's toes at a critical moment? Provence sat with his face half in shadow—there was something which reminded her of a portrait by Velasquez in the pose of his head and the light on his features. What she chose to call the artistic craving in her nature was satisfied. She could

call him picturesque. Picturesque, and with a Future ! She drew a sigh of relief, and under pretence of steady-ing a rose which was half-falling from its vase on a table close by him (for with her, even impulse was well-tempered with a sense of the effective) sat down by his side. He tried to remember afterwards what they had talked of, but he could only recall the sound of her voice, the glance of her eyes, the pleasure he had felt when, in one of her quick, expressive movements, she had touched his arm to call attention to a vine which grew outside the window.

HAVING once decided that Provence reminded her of a Velasquez, Cynthia plunged into open flirtation. On one pretence and another she encouraged him to spend a good portion of his time at the Rectory every day ; after a week or so pretence was dropped altogether, and her family were given to understand that he came solely for the sake of seeing her. This stage of affairs was hailed with undisguised thankfulness by the Rector, whose feeling for harmony had been rudely jarred by the necessity for his acting the blind dragon. He had long lost

interest in Cynthia's little *comédies à deux*—they always ended the same way. "Provence is at least thirty, or he looks it," he said, in a confidential chat with Lady Theodosia; "and if he chooses to make a fool of himself over a mere child like Cynthia—a girl of twenty—I really think it would be positively indelicate on my part to interfere. As for Cynthia, I should consider it a grave error of judgment to notice anything one way or the other. These innocent little affairs all tend to mould a girl's character; they give her self-confidence; the more experience she has of men, the more likely she will be to choose a good husband." Lady Theodosia said nothing. She was waiting for the point of the Rector's observation: "After all, you know," he said, "if anything *should* happen, Dobbs thinks a lot of him, and Dobbs has any amount of influence. A successful author makes a handsome income nowadays." Lady Theodosia, who could never, even in imagination, condescend to the unpractical, went through a swift mental calculation as to the amount of income necessary for the maintenance of a

house in Fitz-John's Avenue—allowing for a bi-monthly dinner party, an evening once a week, a fortnightly afternoon, five servants and a brougham.

"It could be done for six thousand a year," she said, aloud, "and it would mean management, even then. Besides, his brain might give out. Just think what a bore that would be!"

"We won't think anything so uncharitable," said the Rector, kindly. He only liked to contemplate the cheerful—having boundless faith in the law of self-preservation in the human character.

"Cynthia," said Lady Theodosia, one day, when Provence had left them after an unusually long visit, "what do you see in this man?" Now between this lady and her niece there existed a feeling which, though, not affection (for there are no Davids and Jonathans among women), might very well be compared to the *bonhomie* of two fellow-artists—two artists who are respectively convinced that their styles are too distinct to clash in disagreeable rivalry. So far as it lay in Cynthia's disposition to be confi-

dential, she was confidential with her aunt ; so far as Lady Theodosia spoke her mind, she spoke it to her niece ; so far as moral influence went, neither had the presumption to attempt anything of the kind where the other was concerned. Thus they always kept their tempers—a remarkable circumstance in the friendship of two women.

“What do you see in this man ?” repeated Lady Theodosia. To do her justice, she had not the smallest concern for her niece : she was thinking of Provence, for whom—in spite of his shoes—she had conceived a liking which only required a large balance at his banker’s to develop into auntly affection. “But he is not the man for Cynthia,” she thought ; “he has not enough of the brute about him. A John Knox might be able to manage her ; and then a good deal would depend on his tailor.” Here she was mistaken. Cynthia could excuse considerable eccentricity in the dress of a person of note.

She blushed a little when her aunt asked her what she saw in Provence. She felt it almost a slur on her taste. Few women care to feel the necessity of justifying their preferences—least

of all a woman in whom the desire to be thought more than humanly infallible was the master passion.

"Don't *you* care about him?" she said at last. Her tone was almost apologetic.

"I think he is quite charming," said Lady Theodosia, "an interesting person in every way. But I may as well say at once that I don't think you ought to flirt with him—he takes it much too seriously. Things cannot remain as they are for ever; there must be a climax. For the present he has put you on a pedestal and worships you afar off, but sooner or ~~later~~ he will remember that you are flesh. Man, after all, is not a spirit."

Cynthia laughed or—to be truthful at the expense of euphony—chuckled. "How you exaggerate!" she said. "Mr. Provence has come here for his health, and naturally wishes to be amused. Besides, when a man has been ordered complete rest, he likes to imagine himself in love with some woman. It is marmalade for the pill. If I had not appeared he would have discovered unique attractions in his landlady."

"Why did he not choose Agatha?" said Lady Theodosia.

Cynthia gave her answer unconsciously by looking into the mirror which faced them. "My dear aunt," she said, "Agatha is dutiful, and thinks of others and reads Hooker—she will no doubt get a kind husband. But he will never be her lover. Men do not love these still women—they have a high opinion of them."

"I have no more to say," said Lady Theodosia, "except this—these literary and artistic people are very dangerous. You never find two alike, and the only certain thing about them is that ultimately they will do something to make everybody uncomfortable."

But she was not pleased with her niece that day. She herself was no doubt very worldly, very cynical and very heartless, but she had not always been so; and although her more generous instincts often perished, like weak chickens from sheer inability to break through their shell, they did occasionally struggle into evidence. She liked Provence, and where she liked she could—at a pinch—be loyal. "Cynthia shall not make a fool of

him, if I can help it," she said to herself, with a vicious snap of her teeth. "She is altogether too self-confident. She would be much improved by an occasional failure. She is too used to success." If the jealousy, the natural jealousy of a woman who had outlived her own days of desperate flirtation, added a zest to her purpose, the purpose itself was none the less a kind one so far as her intentions went and Provence was concerned. As a rule, there can be no better adviser for a man than a woman who has a passionless affection for him : she can under these circumstances almost succeed in being impartial ; she can even see where he may be in fault ; she can bring herself to face his shortcomings—nay, more, she can deal with them. If Lady Theodosia had been asked just why she liked Provence, she would not have been able to say. She could not possibly tell people that he reminded her of her first lover—about the legs.

The morning after her conversation with Cynthia she walked to the cottage where he lodged, for the ostensible reason of inquiring after his landlady's

baby, who was cutting teeth. It was a significant fact that she put on her most becoming bonnet and mantle. That a ministering angel should of necessity be dowdy was no part of her creed. When she had finished with the landlady she strolled into the garden, where she saw Provence reading. He was surprised, but rather pleased than otherwise, to see her: first, because she was Cynthia's aunt; secondly, because she was an attractive-looking woman.

"I have come to have a chat with you," she began—with a directness she was capable of when it appeared expedient; "you won't think me a bore?" She smiled at him with her large brown eyes. "Let us walk down this path," she continued, "we can talk better." With one hand she caught up her silk skirt: she laid the other—covered in light grey kid—very lightly on his arm. The movement was perfectly spontaneous, and probably the nearest approach to a motherly caress she could think of. She had never felt so nearly sorry for any one in her life as she did for him. "He reminds me more than ever of Talbot!" she sighed to herself.

"I am coming straight to the point," she said, "because I know you like candour. I want to tell you—you will forgive me, I know—I want to tell you that you are growing too fond of my niece. Pray don't look so distressed. I am sorry to have to say it—it is so difficult to put these things—you know what I mean. I don't think you ever tried to disguise your admiration for her—there has been no necessity for anything of the kind. If I have misunderstood you, however, you will tell me so."

Provence, who had at first turned red, was now very pale.

"You are quite right," he said, proudly. "I have not tried to disguise my feelings—it may be I could not. But I have not been foolish enough to hope that—that Miss Heathcote had the smallest interest in me—if that is what you mean."

"You are not being sincere with yourself," said Lady Theodosia. "Cynthia has given you every encouragement—you must feel it—whether you admit it is another matter. You are too modest—a sure sign you are very much in love. It

is just because Cynthia has led you to believe in every possible way that she cares for your society quite as much as you care for hers, that I am here to-day. Don't contradict me and say she hasn't: I am a woman of the world and know what I am talking about. Now when Cynthia takes it into her head to flirt, she is absolutely without principle; she forgets everything—except herself. Let me entreat you to leave this place—you are only making misery for yourself by staying. She will never love you: it isn't in her to love any one. I am fond of her; I know her fascination—she fascinates *me*: but she is made of granite. You may like her, you may admire her to your heart's content, but you must not love her."

"Lady Theodosia," he said, "I know you mean to be kind; I know you believe every word you say: but as you have been straightforward with me I will be perfectly plain with you. I cannot think as you do with regard to—Miss Heathcote. She would not be granite to the right man. That I do not happen to be that man is not at all extraordinary. You know," he

added, "every man cannot be Mark Anthony, that a Cleopatra should love him—it is enough for an ordinary mortal that he may have the inestimable privilege of breaking his heart for a Cleopatra."

"You are a fool," said Lady Theodosia, "and of course I like you better for it. I did not expect you to believe me as a matter of fact, but I have done what I honestly thought was my duty. I have warned you, and I can do no more. As for this nonsense about the right man, don't make excuses for her on that ground. The right man for her is he who has the most money and the biggest position. She was born for noise, not love. We won't return to this subject again. As I said just now, I have done what I could, and the rest lies with yourself. Naturally you will hate me after this, but I knew what I was bringing upon myself when I started. I will say this," she added, after a pause: "if Cynthia should prove different to what I have said (but she won't), I should be glad for her sake, because I like you, and I think—this is the truth—you are far too good for her. Good-bye."

Then she pressed his hand and hurried away.

Cynthia sat at home in the meantime, pondering her aunt's sayings in her heart. Until Lady Theodosia had spoken, she had lived her amusement with Provence from day to day, taking small thought for the morrow, and having still less for the yesterday. Now she felt she ought to prepare in some way for a climax. It was a revelation to her to find that preparation was necessary. She usually left climaxes to the hour, her mood and fate. But she liked Provence; she could not persuade herself that all the climax would be on his side. This was awkward. Apart, however, from any mere personal attraction he may have had for her, he had once told her—after a great deal of ingenious cross-questioning on her part—that the great Dobbs—Dobbs mighty in literature, in Fleet Street, and the New Criticism—had offered him the editorship of "The Present Age," a monthly organ devoted to the propaganda of piquant (but not necessarily original) theories of life. It made a feature of unsigned articles, which were commonly supposed to be writ-

ten by the Great (and perhaps Improper) of the earth.

A woman need not be in the marketplace to show her talent for marketing. Cynthia saw at once that the editor of a periodical so justly revered as "The Present Age" would enjoy a reputation, and something in the way of income not totally unworthy of a Veiled Prophet. Now if there was one thing she respected far above titles and riches, it was success; if she had one cherished ambition, it was to be the wife of a successful man, a man who painted much talked-of pictures, or wrote conspicuous books, or preached to big congregations, or, in fact, was able in any way, either by his ability or impudence, to push himself into a prominent position. She naturally preferred a genius to a quack, she liked what is considered the best of everything; but geniuses were rare, and although one could never mistake a genius for a quack, it was quite possible to mistake a quack for a genius. Provence, she feared, was a great deal too much in earnest to care for applause just for its own sake, but she saw no reason why, under the influence of an ambitious

woman, he should not make a considerable buzz about his name with comparatively little trouble. Left to himself, he would probably spend his life trying to realize some crazy ideal, and in the end accomplish nothing. That was always the way with a sort of genius, a man whose mind was pitched higher than his voice. "I could make something of him," she said to herself, "if I could get certain notions out of his head." For he, in his vainglory, had spoken lightly of "The Present Age;" had laughed at the idea of being its editor; had announced his intention of sticking to his novel — an incomprehensible manuscript which Cynthia could not understand, and which he did not seem able to explain.

That evening she went into the garden as usual, and as usual found Provence in the arbour. He always came after dinner, at the Rector's kind invitation, to run through a little music. He looked very pale and very determined. Cynthia was more than ever convinced that he was quite the most interesting of all her lovers—and she had had a number.

"You look like Prometheus defying

the Furies—you remember in Shelley!" she said, as she came up to him. "Are you angry—with me?"

"I have come to say good-bye—to you all," he said abruptly; "I am going to London to-night."

"To-night?" said Cynthia, "to-night? Have you heard any bad news? How rude I am—but it is so sudden." She seemed, and was in reality, dismayed and disappointed. Was this the climax? This, the supreme situation of the third act? Would there be no one but that dull Edward Cargill for the remainder of the summer? No wonder her heart sank.

"It is necessary for me to go," said Provence; "I have stayed too long already." Some faint inkling of his meaning dawned upon her, and her spirits brightened.

"It must be very dull for you," she said, with a melancholy little sigh, "very, very dull." This was more than he could bear.

"Oh, Cynthia," he said, "you know it has not been dull."

"Then why are you going?" she said.

"Because I dare not stay."

She hesitated, looked down, and blushed. She was about to take a bold step. She really did not want him to go. She moved nearer to him, so near that a lock of her hair, loosened by the wind, blew across his face.

"What shall I do when you have gone?" she said.

He could scarcely trust himself to speak. "You would not care?"

"How could I help—caring?"

"It was so nice of him," she said to herself when she was going to sleep that night, "not to try and kiss me. Men don't understand, as a rule, that a woman likes to get used to them by degrees. It is rather amusing to be engaged, for a change. He makes love very prettily, and yet is always a man."

It was Cynthia's wish that the engagement should be kept secret. "It is so uncomfortable to have the outside world in one's confidence," she said. He urged in vain that her father at least was not the outside world. "The only thing that can possibly concern papa," she answered, "are your prospects. When you

have settled everything with Dobbs, it will be time to speak to him." She did not add that unless everything was settled with Dobbs, and in her way, the necessity for interviewing her father on the subject of a formal betrothal would never arise—such candour was far removed from *her* method of gaining a point. At first he told her decidedly that nothing on earth would induce him to take up journalism, and the editor's work for "The Present Age" would mean journalism in its most aggravated form. He cared nothing for income and hated notoriety. Cynthia liked him for appearing a little obstinate: it would add lustre to her triumph. For she scented triumph in the distance; patience, a few more smiles, once or twice the suspicion of a tear, sometimes the mere worldly wisdom of "What shall we live on?", the pressure of her cheek against his shoulder—"To please *me*, Godfrey." There was never a Samson so strong but he met his Delilah: it is only by the mercy of God that Delilah has occasionally a conscience. Provence surrendered one evening. The next morning, however, he told her he had

thought better of it: he renounced Dobbs and all his works for ever.

"Very well," said Cynthia, quietly. "When I have made a mistake I am generally strong enough to own it. I have made a mistake in you. It does not console me to remember that women are usually mistaken—in men."

"Have I ever tried to give you a false impression of me?"

"I don't know. But I will own, if you like, that it did not require much trying. I was only too willing to be deceived. That is a humiliating confession—not that I ought to mind humiliation—now."

"Cynthia! What are you saying?"

"You have disappointed me. That I feel the disappointment so much is perhaps amusing—for you. It is only an additional bitterness to me."

"Is this because I have broken a foolish promise I made to you last night—and before I have suggested any compromise?"

"I despise a man who breaks his word and makes explanations afterwards."

"I thought you were just."

"Do not talk to me of justice! Have I not loved you? was I not,

am I not still, ambitious for you? And you have failed me. If I did not know that you had ability I would say nothing—I would not have cared for you in the first place. It is because I see you so indolent, so satisfied to grovel among the nobodies whose only *métier* is to grovel, that I am heartsick. I admit I like to see brains in a man or a woman: it may be weakness on my part."

"Will you not give me time to prove what I can do?"

"You have been all your life proving, and this offer from Dobbs seems to be the proof. It is the only thing I pin my faith to."

"That is to say," said Provence, "you believe in me because Dobbs does."

"You may attribute any meanness to me you please."

"Do you wish me to close with him?"

"My wishes can have no interest for you—now."

"You know your wishes are everything to me."

"You think more of your unfinished novel! And—you would not do it if I did wish it."

"But do you?"

"Am I not crying my eyes out—because you won't."

"Then you do wish it, after all I have said?"

"This is childish. Well—yes—I suppose I do."

"You are sure? You do not care how ashamed I may be afterwards?"

"That is an absurd way of putting it. I do not consider you a competent judge of your own work."

"That may or may not be. But would you care for me—even a little—if I did this to please you?"

"I could not care for you—a little."

"Cynthia! Do you mean that?"

"Yes, I mean it. Women are weak, and after all I am only a woman. Why do you try me so and make me say things—in anger? Do you think I enjoy saying them?"

"But—dearest—I cannot say yes to Dobbs."

"Are you trying an experiment with me to see how long my patience will last? When it fails I think you will be sorry—at least, if you love me as you pretend to do."

"You are using hard words."

"Not too hard. Is it a noble

amusement, to torment a woman who loves you?"

"I would die for you—but I cannot say yes to Dobbs."

"I thought only women were obstinate."

"It is not a question of obstinacy, but of right."

"That implies I am urging you to do wrong."

"No—but you do not understand."

"Then I am a fool? I prefer, on the whole, to be a knave. I must decline to squabble like this. It is not only wearying, but vulgar. So far as I am concerned the subject shall drop for ever. Say no to Dobbs, by all means."

"Cynthia, you will see that I am right—some day."

"Possibly. When I do see it I will own I was wrong—I can promise no more; but till then—till then—I will never willingly set eyes upon you again."

"Is this the end, Cynthia?"

"The end? Yes. I wish there had never been a beginning. I am sick of you, but most of all sick of myself."

"I will go, then."

"It is certainly best that you should."

It seemed as though the sound of her own voice had barely died away when he was out of sight. She waited a few moments, not so much in the hope that he would return, but because she felt that to stand there alone—determined if sorrowful—was not only the most artistic, but the most picturesque thing to do.

He returned, however. It was not so easy to leave her—with some of her tears on his sleeve. "It shall be as you say," he said. He felt as though he had signed away his soul.

Cynthia laughed with the gaiety of a child. "You goose!" she said. "you goose! Why couldn't you have given in sooner?"

* * * *

Cynthia felt she had done well: the prospect of marrying a successful writer became daily more pleasing to her. As to the novelty of "being engaged," she had classed it in her list of tried-and-found-wanting experiments before the end of the first fortnight. She found her lover's interest in all that concerned her a decided nuisance: he asked her

questions which were often difficult to answer: he was too anxious to take upon his own shoulders the burden of her future. She had proposed to manage him—it was far from her intention that he should ever dream of managing her. He recommended her, kindly, but with an air of authority the authors he would like her to read—among others Thomas à Kempis; he gave her volumes of Scarlatti—old editions with a figured bass and not so much as a pedal mark; he borrowed her *Rhapsodies Hongroises*, and always forgot to return them: he told her that Nature was better than Botticelli (which, to be honest, she thought herself—but the Rectory culture did not allow her to say so); in fact, he showed that he did not consider her taste—on all points—as perfect as it might be. When the day arrived for his departure for town, she felt positively relieved. “He is charming, of course,” she confided to Lady Theodosia, whom she had told of the engagement unknown to Provence, for, in spite of her determination to keep the matter secret, she had felt the need of a pair of ears for her bursts

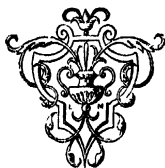
of dissatisfaction. She had reached that ripeness of experience when silent suffering seems misdirected energy. "Yes, he is charming," she repeated, "only — I hardly know how to express it—when I have been with him a whole afternoon I feel as though I had been for a picnic with the Twelve Apostles and Peter left early! I always thought that Peter was the most interesting."

The parting was a very different matter to Provence. He kissed her once—he was always afraid of wearying her with his kisses—and fairly fled out of her presence, not daring to linger over his good-bye. It was one of his faults, no doubt, to take things too seriously. When he was quite out of sight and hearing, Cynthia rushed into the drawing-room—which was empty—and executed a wild but extremely graceful war-dance in front of the long mirror. When she was quite breathless she flung open the piano—even lifted the top to let out its full volume, and with her foot firmly planted on the pedal she thumped with all her might a barbarian valse by a barbarian and unpronounceable composer. Lady

Theodosia ran into the room with her small white hands held over her ears.

"My dear Cynthia, what discord! Even the Russian person at the concert did not make such a noise."

"I am so tired of being cultured," said Cynthia, as she wound up her performance with shrieking chromatics in contrary motion. "A woman sacrifices a good deal when she undertakes to steer a possible genius. I shall go into the woods this afternoon with that stupid Edward Cargill and read him *Three Men in a Boat*!"





V.

THERE was never a Rachel who had not lurking possibilities of the Jezebel, nor a Jezebel who had nothing of the Rachel—in weak moments. Cynthia had no sooner gained her point with Provence, when she began to have misgivings. She was not at all sure that she had been right. She should have waited a little longer : she should have remembered that if genius has an infinite capacity for taking pains it has also the tendency to dream—a process which the practical onlooker is apt to mistake for dawdling. At first she reproached herself bitterly for her want of judgment : she had been betrayed into vulgarity : she wondered—the thought was unbearable—if Provence had a sorrowful contempt for her views on

art and the artistic life. But she had always her boundless self-appreciation to come to the rescue in hours like this: when there was no longer any doubt in her mind that a mistake had been made, it did not take long to decide that Provence himself had been entirely to blame. He ought to have shown more firmness: he had given up his most cherished convictions because of some idle words she had spoken in a fit of caprice. The phrase "idle words," which her ingenious conscience had given her at less than a nod, she pounced on and worked up into a whole theory of justification. The case stood thus:—She could not in reason be expected to marry a man whose career as yet was all promise and no execution: she was not a servant-maid nor a Rachel, to wait for her lover while he served his time: she had, in her love for him and in her anxiety to find some practical basis for their engagement, no doubt urged him to take the vulgar and tangible in preference to the æsthetic and visionary: her error was that she had spoken under the pressure of the moment, without due

thought and against her own true instincts; he, being the man and the one whose career was in question, should have stood his ground and refused to be influenced. Then, how she would have respected him! She was thinking all this when the post-bag arrived and in it a letter from Provence. This was the letter:—

“I cannot keep the promise I made you. I cannot say yes to Dobbs—I would rather slice ham in a cook-shop. Dearest, dearest, do understand this and give me a little time.—G. P.”

She read this, trembled with anger, and was perhaps more truly in love with him than she had ever been in her life. Unfortunately, however, she did not know this, but rushed to Lady Theodosia, who was sitting alone in the drawing-room knitting charity comforters for the poor.

“That is the way he treats me,” she said, giving her aunt the letter.

‘I am tired of him. What does he want me to do? Men are so selfish. I was a fool to listen to him in the beginning.’

“Geniuses are never practical,” said Lady Theodosia.

"The fact of the matter is this," said Cynthia, "the artistic temperament ought not to marry."

Lady Theodosia looked her perfect agrément, but said nothing.

Cynthia began to march up and down the room. "The whole thing has been a mistake," she said; "I must put an end to it. I was not destined for a villa and a dinner of herbs."

"Some herbs are so richly gravied they might very well pass for ox," said her aunt. "If an author does get on, he gets on very well indeed."

"But how if he doesn't?" said Cynthia.

"That's the point," said Lady Theodosia; "do you feel like taking the risk?"

Cynthia looked out of the window. It was a singularly clear, bright day; in the distance she could see the clock-tower of Northwold Hall.

"No," she said, slowly, "I do not feel like taking the risk."

Lady Theodosia gave two short sighs—one for Godfrey, one for human nature—and then smiled at her niece.

"A wise decision," she said.

"Although I have been a fool," said Cynthia, "thank goodness I have not had the folly to parade about the country with my *fiancé* tacked on to my skirts. As it is, nobody knows anything about it."

"I hope he will not do anything absurd when you tell him," said Lady Theodosia.

"I shall write it," said Cynthia.

"Writing is dangerous," said her aunt.

"Not anything that I write," said Cynthia.

And then—was it fate or accident?—the door opened and Edward Cargill was announced.

"That is the man for Cynthia," thought Lady Theodosia at once; "he would be very kind to her and keep her in comfort."

"How awfully jolly to find you in!" exclaimed that amiable gentleman. "Mother sent a lot of messages, but I forget every one of them. I hope you don't mind," and he settled down in a chair with the comfortable air of a man who has determined to be happy for, at least, an hour.

"We won't mind if you can tell us

something more exciting than the messages," said Cynthia.

"You *are* sarcastic," said Edward; "it's tremendously hard on a fellow to expect him to be interesting when he comes from a dull place like ours. I don't know why it is, but houses are always the liveliest and all that sort of thing when the woman isn't one of these awfully good housekeepers. Mother is such a splendid manager," he added.

"That is a very happy remark," said Lady Theodosia, "and just reminds me that I am due at a committee-meeting in half an hour. Perhaps I shall find you here when I come back. I shan't be long."

"Thanks awfully," said Edward, "perhaps you will—if Miss Heathcote can stand me."

"He is really a very ingenuous, simple-hearted creature," thought Lady Theodosia as she hurried down the corridor. "He would be so grateful to Cynthia for marrying him."

When the door closed on Lady Theodosia, Edward leant forward in his chair and began to flick imaginary specks of dust off his boots with his riding-whip. Cynthia understood

the movement well—it was a habit of Edward's when he was labouring under mental excitement. Among her stronger qualities, resignation to the inevitable was perhaps the foremost. "He is now going to make a bigger fool of himself than usual," she thought.

"I like Lady Theodosia very much," he began, "but I'm not sorry she's gone."

"That's very rude."

"No, it isn't—at least, it isn't rude to tell you. It always seems so natural to tell you everything I think."

"You regard me as a kind of indulgent grandmother, in fact."

"Cynthia, how can you?"

"Don't look so tragic; it doesn't suit you."

"I don't believe you ever cared about any one in your life; I don't believe you could."

"I never tried. How should I set to work?"

"Well, you ought to let yourself go more—you must let yourself go if you want to fall in love. As it is now, I am sure you could argue yourself out of anything."

"Mustn't one argue if one is in love?"

"No; it's ever so much nicer to keep quiet and just go on loving."

"I call that very weak," said Cynthia. "I don't believe in falling in love, as you call it, to begin with; but if I felt that there was any—person—for whom I felt more—respect—than others, I should have to satisfy myself that the—person—could bear criticism."

"But if you love any one," said Edward, eagerly, "you don't want to criticise them. Don't you remember in 'Fifine at the Fair' the husband tells his wife to see herself in his soul, and not bother so much about her actual personal appearance? and of course the same would apply to a character. Browning doesn't express it quite that way," he added, "but that is what it comes to. I got a fellow to explain it to me."

"I should have hated that husband," said Cynthia. "How I should respect a man who had the strength of character to say, 'Cynthia, if there is anything in your style, I don't admire it. You are too tall, and I don't like the colour of your hair. How-

ever——' and so on. That would be treating me like a rational being."

"My experience of women is——" said Edward; and then he blushed. "I mean," he said, "all women like to be appreciated. Anyhow," he added, desperately, "if a woman is awfully beautiful, I don't see any harm in telling her so."

"If she is—awfully beautiful—perhaps not. You see, she would probably know it."

"I don't believe you know how beautiful you are."

"How you take one's breath away! I know I am—not exactly repulsive."

"You are lovely."

"These compliments are very noisy, and—and you have no right to say them."

"No right! When you know I love the very ground under your feet."

"Well! I don't know anything of the kind, and—I wish you wouldn't."

"I can't help it."

"I should think you would have more self-respect."

"Damn my self-respect."

"Do you mistake me for your brown mare?"

"I beg your pardon—but I will damn anything or anybody that comes between us."

"How dare you talk of things coming between us? I don't understand you. You are nothing to me whatever. And as for this display of temper, I should say you had no self-respect to damn. You see I don't mince words when I speak my mind."

"Why should you—to me? You can pitch things at me, if you like."

"This conversation does not promise to end satisfactorily to either of us."

"Cynthia, will you marry me?"

"Can you presume to ask such a question—now?"

"When a man's in earnest he doesn't think of opportunities and occasions. I must know to-day whether I am to blow my brains out or not."

"Don't do anything rash, but ride home and devour an immense dinner first. I hope, too, you will sleep well after it. How can you make yourself so ridiculous?"

"You will see that I am in earnest—

too late. Cynthia, once more—will you marry me?"

"I will not marry you nor any other man."

"I shall shoot myself."

"If you particularly wish, I won't stand in your way."

"Have you no heart? Are you made of stone? You know I have loved you for years—all my life—from the first time I saw you. I remember how you looked quite well. Your nurse was curling your hair round a stick, and you were keeping as quiet as a mouse. You were five and a half. And you can tell me I am nothing to you!"

"She never curled my hair; it always curled naturally! As for saying you are nothing to me, I was angry—then. I don't dislike you—in your proper place."

"Then will you marry me?"

"I will see."

"Oh, Cynthia!"

"Don't touch me, please. We are not Hodge and Betsy. And let me warn you, if you want to make me angry—so angry that I will never speak to you again—try to kiss me, or something unpleasant of that sort."

"You would soon get accustomed to it. After all, it's the most usual and natural thing to do—when one's engaged."

"Then engage yourself to some one who is usual and natural, for I am neither."

"May I tell them we are engaged?"

"Tell them we are engaged! What are you talking about?"

"You have promised to marry me, and I shall run up to town and buy you a diamond and sapphire ring. Do you like sapphires?"

"They're not bad—when they're a good colour."

"They shall be the finest."

"I prefer one—*very* nice one—set in diamonds. And, Edward, I want more than anything—if you want to be charming—a diamond pin for my hair."

"If I may kiss your little finger, you shall have two."

"Do you think I can be bribed by diamonds? Besides, *two* pins would look vulgar; I only want one."

"You have made me so happy!" and then, as he stood by her, he ventured to touch a loose piece of hair which had strayed on her forehead.

For some reason the movement reminded her of Provence. In an instant she sprang to her feet. "How dare you?" she said. "I told you not to touch me. That is what people call caressing. I hate it."

"I will never do it again."

Then, to his dismay, she burst into tears. He had never seen her in tears before.

"I won't have the diamonds," she said, passionately. "Why did you talk about them? I ought to wear sackcloth and ashes for the rest of my life."

"Dear Cynthia, I did not mean to make you angry. Forgive me."

"Will you leave me, then, for to-day? I want to think. My head aches; I am not myself." She looked at him for once—appealingly.

"You are not angry with me? You have forgiven me?"

"Yes—only go. If I seem disagreeable, I am sorry." It is not so hard as one might think to be magnanimous to a beautiful woman. Edward rode home in high spirits.

When he had gone, Cynthia went to her own room and wrote a letter to Provence :

"DEAR MR. PROVENCE,

"From your note to-day I fear you have misconstrued some remarks of mine. It would be painful to me to point out just where the mistake has arisen. Should I have said painful to both of us? In the circumstances, however, I feel I ought to tell you that Mr. Cargill has asked me to be his wife and I have accepted him. The engagement is not yet publicly announced, and will not be until we have fixed a date for the wedding.

"Believe me,

"Yours very truly,

"CYNTHIA CREIGHTON HEATHCOTE."

•

She posted this herself, to make sure that it went that evening. It had no sooner left her hands than she wished it back.

The path of wisdom is almost as thorny as the path of grace—even though it may lead to diamonds, and those the finest in Bond Street.



VI.

THREE months later, Cynthia returned to London from her honeymoon. Lady Theodosia thought that she looked handsomer than ever ; as a work of art she seemed more finished. Parisian dressmakers are certainly clever ; and what picture does not look better for a tasteful frame ? Her expression, however, was scarcely contented.

“Are you disappointed in Edward?” Lady Theodosia ventured to say one day, when Cynthia seemed in a talking mood.

“How could I be disappointed in him?” said the bride ; “is he a man who leads one to expect much?”

“Is he kind?” said Lady Theodosia.

Cynthia smiled. "He is manageable."

"Well," said her aunt, "that is something. I hope he is generous."

"There is Scotch blood in the family, you know," said Cynthia.

"Still, you don't regret the marriage?" said Lady Theodosia; "you don't think you could have done better?"

"I make it a rule never to regret anything," said Cynthia; "regret is a bore. I prefer to call my mistakes experience."

"I don't think you would have been happier with—a poor man," said her aunt, after a pause.

"Perhaps not," said Cynthia. "I could never feel that love is sufficient. Some people regard love as a civilized instinct; others as a side-dish. With me it is a side-dish."

"Those who regard it as a side-dish are less likely to get into trouble," said Lady Theodosia.

"I don't know about that," said Cynthia, "because—I don't mind telling you now, since it is all over, I certainly was very much in love, in my way, with Godfrey Provence. Even at the last minute I would have

broken off with Edward and married him, if he had seemed to care much about my letter, that time. I really wrote it in a temper—he might have read between the lines. It only proves how things work for the best. I know now that he didn't care for me in the least. I have not heard from him since—not a word, not a line."

"Perhaps he has been ill," suggested Lady Theodosia.

"Ill!" said Cynthia. "His novel was published yesterday. I read the announcement in *The Times*. That does not sound like illness. No, he subordinates everything to his writing. He liked me well enough till I seemed to interfere with that. If I had had red hair and a bad complexion, he would have hated the sight of me. But then," she went on, relapsing into her former voice of indifference, "what does it matter one way or the other? Of course, I gave myself a great deal of unnecessary unhappiness at the time. I started on my wedding tour the most miserable woman in the world. I prayed that the boat might sink which took us to Calais. I should probably have died of fright

if it had. I am merely telling you all this to prove to you how silly a girl can be if she attaches too much importance to sentiment. It is far easier to be Juliet than Cressida. You may depend that Cressida had a great deal of self-control."

"I think it is only fair to Godfrey Provence to say this—you are certainly difficult to understand. Men divide women into so many types, and when they see a woman they put her down as a representative of one of these. They like to think that if she is type *a* she will do this, if type *b* that, if type *c* the other, and so on. It is very absurd, of course, for no two women are the same any more than one wave is like another."

"If he had loved me he would have understood me," said Cynthia. "At any rate he would not have given me up so easily."

Lady Theodosia shook her head. "I don't pretend to explain either of you," she said. "You may know a tree by its fruit, but certainly not men and women by their actions."

"It has all ended now," said Cynthia, "and well enough for both of us. You can't say that of all endings."

"Well enough, yes—if it is the end." At that moment they heard Edward's voice in the hall. "I don't think that bonnet-strings suit every face," Lady Theodosia was saying as he came into the room.

"Still talking about dress?" he said. "I've got a bit of news for you which will keep you going very comfortably till dinner. Provence is married."

Neither of the women stirred; nor did they look at each other. Cynthia, perhaps, smiled a little. Edward felt that his news had fallen flat.

"He's married his cousin," he went on, "a Miss Hemingway, daughter of that Lady Hemingway who goes in for bazaars. The girl is plain, and not much in her. These literary cusses have awfully queer tastes. They don't know what love is, poor devils!"

"Who told you about it?" said Cynthia.

"I heard it at the club," said her husband, "from a fellow who knows the bride. They say, too, his book is going to make a hit."

"When was he married?" said Lady Theodosia.

"This morning," said Edward. "I suppose it will be in the papers to-morrow. I used to think he was sweet on Agatha, always hanging about the Rectory as he did last summer."

If a new light suddenly dawned upon him he was discreet enough not to reveal the fact, but with a benedictory smile, as became a husband and the head of the house, he went out.

Cynthia was the first to speak. "I'm glad the Calais boat didn't sink," she said; "but even if it had, I can't help thinking that I should have had the best of it." Her lips curved and a dimple came into her cheek, but there was no smile in her eyes.

"I dare say this Miss Hemingway is very well suited to him," said Lady Theodosia.

"I know all about her," said Cynthia. "He once stopped at a country house with her. He told me she was a very good walker and ate an astonishingly large breakfast."

"I have certainly heard more impassioned descriptions," said Lady Theodosia.

"Nevertheless, he has married her," said Cynthia.

"Yes, he has married her," said Lady Theodosia, "and you have married Edward ; but I don't think that proves anything."

"Perhaps not," said Cynthia ; "a marriage rarely does prove anything. The third person who could explain is always silent." Then she said nothing for some minutes. When she spoke her face lit up with unfeigned gladness. "This Miss Hemingway has straw-coloured hair—and he detests blondes."

Then they both went to dress for dinner.

In reply to a letter from his friend the Hon. and Rev. Percival Heathcote, inquiring, among other things, about that eccentric man, Godfrey Provence, the great Dobbs wrote as follows :—

"I will not say definitely that I am disappointed in him. His book is extremely clever, and I have heard of people reading it twice. That sounds well, but of course it may not mean money. At present I should call it an artistic rather than a financial success. Still, one can only hope for the best. He takes the whole thing very queerly—says that the book may

be very poor stuff, but it is at all events the best he can do. That seems to please him more than all the rest—to think it is his best. He is most extraordinary—pig-headed as a mule! (Rather mixed that.) And, Lord save us! why did he marry? Have you seen her? Talk about ‘pious orgies!’ She is plain, is timid, and adores: *figures-vous*. My wife tells me she has already started a tea-gown. Provence seems rather embarrassed, and is, I should say, quietly happy—with reservations. What did he see in her? However, the soul’s the stature of the man—not his wife. He may be a giant, in spite of her.”





PART II.

I.

IT was generally admitted in the Family—and perhaps outside it—that if any one wanted to discuss the Family, or hear news of the Family, or give advice to the Family, or make laws for the Family, it was all to be done at Mrs. Golightly's over the tea. And the Family—as the Golightlys understood the term—was a large, unlimited body, not subject to arbitrary laws and conditions: any one might belong to it, provided only that the any one was in some way or other, whether by accident or necessity or marriage or any other mysterious cause, on speaking terms with the immediate representatives or distant connexions of the Golightly stock.

On one particular afternoon, therefore—a warm, bright afternoon in May—a small party was assembled in Mrs. Golightly's drawing-room. The party consisted of that lady herself, her husband, her step-son, Lady Hemingway, and Mrs. Godfrey Provence.

"Fancy!" said Lady Hemingway, "Grace has been married three years to-day."

"And where is Godfrey?" said George Golightly.

Grace started a sigh, but checked it and smiled instead. The smile was both touching and interesting: touching because forced, interesting because it implied an *arrière pensée*. At least this was George's analysis of it. The rest were less observant, or rather more indifferent as to the subtle lights and shades of Grace's not too-varying expression.

"Godfrey is at the Museum," she said; "he will be there all day."

In appearance and manner she had certainly improved since her marriage. Her face—formerly too red and round—was thinner and merely pink: she had perfect self-possession: she talked better: she had lived with Godfrey

long enough to catch his way of looking at things—that is to say, she had caught it as a trick—she knew the view he would be likely to take of anything; as for his way of getting it, of that she knew nothing. She avoided the labyrinth. So people called her original—not knowing her husband. But the really curious thing was this: her husband thought her original too, and often admired her wit. Unconscious victim of egoism! It was his own.

“I think,” went on Grace, “he quite forgot it was the anniversary of our wedding-day: so like him, you know, and I hadn’t the heart to remind him.”

“Good gracious!” said her mother, “don’t be sentimental! You can’t expect a man who works with his head to remember every little household matter.”

“I don’t expect it,” said Grace; “you misunderstand me. I didn’t remind him because he looked so happy, for him, when he started for the Museum. If I had said anything, he might have thought that he ought to stay at home, or take me to a concert or something of the sort, like

an ordinary husband. Next week I dare say he will remember and be awfully grieved about it. He will think he has neglected a duty, and then—well, whenever he feels that, I believe if I asked for the moon he would try to get it.”

“You are lucky to have married such a man,” said Lady Hemingway; “he’s a most willing creature!”

“But she never asks for the moon,” remarked George.

Grace said nothing. When she asked for anything, it was always within arm-reach after a certain amount of straining.

“By the bye,” said Lady Hemingway, suddenly, “did you see in the paper yesterday morning that Sir Edward Cargill is dead. Typhoid fever. Such a pity! And he only came into the title a month ago.”

“Nice young fellow—inclined to be stout—twelve thousand a year, at least,” said the Captain, rapidly. “Belonged to my club—rarely dined there—dined deuced well when he did. Knew him quite well—very civil. Quite cut up to hear of his death. Only seven-and-twenty. Shocking!”

"I just mentioned him," said Lady Hemingway, "because I thought that Godfrey was friendly with the Cargills at one time. Didn't he visit them in the country—or something?"

"Oh no," said Harriet; "he knew the Heathcotes very well, and one of them married the poor man who is just dead. That's all."

"Ah!" said Lady Hemingway, "is that it?" She waited, and then—"The Cargill woman is very good-looking."

"So I've heard," said Harriet.

"Men over thirty rave about her," said Lady Hemingway. "Did Godfrey ever rave?"

Grace began to bristle at once. "Godfrey never raves about any one," she said, "but if he admires either of the Heathcote girls, it is Agatha, the eldest. He always says that she has the most regular features. I don't suppose he ever saw much of the other, for she must have been practically engaged to young Cargill the summer Godfrey was at Little Speenham."

"I see," said Lady Hemingway. She could not resist adding, however,

"Clergymen's' daughters are always so sly. You never know what they're up to. They usually catch the richest men in the parish."

"And play the devil with the others," added the good Captain.

"Precisely," said his sister.

"How dreadful!" murmured Harriet. Then she turned to Grace, who for some reason looked a little sulky.

"How is little Elizabeth?" she said; "does she seem fond of her father?"

"Oh, yes," said Grace. "Of course she is only two—a baby really—but they get on very well."

"Does he want her to be extraordinary," said Captain Golightly—"learn metaphysics, and all that? Ugh!" He had an idea that metaphysic had something to do with medicine.

"No," said Grace, "he only wants her to be healthy. Health with him means a whole system of philosophy."

"Poor little beggar!" groaned the Captain; "and won't you have a doctor's bill—that's all."

"Clever men never have their children properly educated," said Lady Hemingway. "Grace will have to see that the child is brought up in

a lady-like manner. Not that the bringing-up will matter much one way or the other—since she's a girl. If her looks are all right, one needn't worry about anything else—except to see that her clothes suit her. But there's plenty of time for that. You can't do much with her till she's out. Of course, take care of her complexion and keep her back straight. That's quite enough to keep any mother occupied."

"If I were only stronger!" said Grace. She was always a little uneasy when interest in herself threatened to spread to her child. She had, perhaps, the irritating half-suspicion that the child repaid interest better—might eventually end even in getting it all. She had seen this very nearly happen in the case of her husband. She was fond of little Elizabeth, too; she wanted her to be noticed: to have had a plain, stupid little girl whom nobody cared about—that would have been a thorn in the flesh, and a weariness; and yet—and yet—well, it was hard to get reflected glory from one's own child. The whole principle was wrong.

"If I were only stronger!" she re-

peated. George looked at her, and wondered why he had never remarked—before her marriage—the clear grey of her eyes, her well-proportioned form, and her restless, nervous mouth. Then he remembered how, for a long time, he had been gradually changing his opinion with regard to Grace—changing it so much, and so gradually, that to-day, when he found himself admiring her eyes and her figure, she seemed to possess all the novelty of a new acquaintance combined with the tried charm of the old. There is nothing more fascinating to a child than an old doll with a new head. The doll, in course of time, swells the dust-heap, but the sentiment is everlasting. It is like the worm which never dies. It overwhelmed George now. He looked at Grace again, and something in her air—a resigned, gentle melancholy—made him fear she was not happy. He felt sorry for her, and angry with Godfrey. “He doesn’t understand her,” he thought. “He means well, but he is too much wrapt up in his work. She wants sympathy and tenderness, and he takes her to a concert. What a stick !” The more he pondered it.

the sadder he grew. "She is pining away under his neglect," he thought.

"You wish you were stronger!" said Lady Hemingway; "what is the matter with you? I wish I had a quarter of your health. Dr. Ives told me, the other day, he considered you quite the most robust woman he knows."

"Ah, well," said Grace, "I'm only too glad to hear it, I'm sure—only doctors don't know everything." Soon after that she kissed her mother and her aunt, said good-bye, and left. George Golightly took her home; he said he wanted to see Godfrey.

For a short time they walked in silence. It was Grace's suggestion that they should walk; she said she was fond of walking, but could very seldom find any one to walk with: Godfrey was a very early riser, and took his exercise before breakfast. Again she sighed, but added, "Dear Godfrey! It is such happiness to see him so completely engrossed with his work."

"You're so unselfish," said George, gruffly.

"Oh no," said Grace, "don't say that. When a woman marries a

gifted man like Godfrey, one of her first duties is surely self-effacement. You see, I regard it as a duty—not a virtue at all. I won't say that I fully realized this when I married. In those days I was very unreasonable, and hoped to keep him entirely to myself. I wanted his ideas to be given to me first, and then—well, then I thought there would be plenty of crumbs for the public. Wasn't I selfish? How could I have expected it? Of course, I soon saw how foolish I was. You know how silent he is—particularly about his writing—and then, when he has been working all day and is too tired to read, he likes to sit and think, or perhaps play with the child. If I only thought of myself, I might be tempted to wish he were a trifle more like other men, or one of those barristers who write a little. They are generally very agreeable, and just literary enough to be interesting. But I'm afraid all this sounds like grumbling—whereas I have everything to be thankful for.”

“It seems to me you have a pretty dull time of it,” said George.

“Well,” said Grace, “doing one's duty is not the liveliest thing in life.

But it is strengthening—morally it not physically. It is always comforting to feel that one is trying to do right."

"How much more noble women are than men," said George with enthusiasm, and thinking that a certain shade of brown looked awfully well with blonde hair.

"I cannot agree with you there," said Grace. "Women, I know, have often noble impulses, but they fail in acting up to them. Suppose we put it this way—that women want to be noble, and some men are."

George reflected on the sweetness of fellow-feeling. "I think Godfrey's a thoroughly good sort, you know," he said suddenly, as a sort of propitiation to his conscience for a lapse he was not quite able, or did not want to explain.

"He has fine qualities," said Grace. And again they were both silent.

Grace had no doubt married for what she considered affection. It was not very deep nor very strong, but it was essentially respectful. Perhaps, too, it was more than half gratitude. Provence was the first man who had ever taken any marked interest in her as an

individual; one or two had allowed her to play piano to their fiddle; here and there one had sent her a book "with the author's compliments"; dancing men, who dined at her mother's, usually asked her for a waltz and the Lancers—somewhere at the end of a programme; men who didn't dance talked to her on politics, the theatres, religion, and other grave matters, but not one of them had ever, like Godfrey, talked to her about Herself. Until she met him, she had bowed in humiliation and self-pity to her mother's *dictum*—"Grace was cut out to be a companion to an elderly lady, in exchange for a comfortable home—the sort of thing one reads in the *Morning Post*. She will never make a good marriage." He had given wings to a clay bird: as much gratitude as one could expect from clay, she gave in return.

"Yes," she repeated, "Godfrey has fine qualities. But I wish—though, of course, no one is perfect—he would not give way to his moods. It is very difficult sometimes to please him. He doesn't find fault, you know; but just looks—well, that very trying look of his,

Not as if he thought himself better than other people—one could deal with an expression like that—but as though he felt grieved that other people were not better themselves. Do you understand? And can you imagine anything more irritating?”

“He was always like that,” said George. “It’s a manner that gives a lot of offence.”

“Naturally it does,” said Grace. “and yet I can’t break him of it; in fact, I can’t explain it to him. We are nearly home now,” she went on. “It has been such a help to me, to be able to talk to you like this. I am so much alone with my own thoughts. I think it must be good for me to speak out sometimes.”

“How is it we saw so little of each other—before you married?” said George. “I feel as though I had missed something.”

Grace blushed, and stumbled a little as she walked.

“Take care,” he said, and caught hold of her arm.

“Thank you,” said Grace. “I think I trod on a piece of coal.”

“These ruffians are not careful

enough," said George, savagely. "What a ridiculous idea it is, to pour coal through a hole in the pavement." And then they both laughed a little uneasily.

As they reached the house, they saw Godfrey standing on the doorstep. George turned red, and felt guilty. He did not accept Godfrey's warm invitation to stay for dinner.

Provence was carrying an immense bunch of daffodils in his hand, which he held towards his wife after Golightly had left them.

"You see, Grace," he said, "I have not forgotten, after all."

Grace had no eye for the flowers; she only saw the amused grin on the face of a passing butcher-boy.

"My dear Godfrey," she said, "thanks awfully. But why didn't you have them sent up from the shop? It looks so odd to carry them through the streets — such a large bunch, too."

She gave them to the housemaid when she got into the house, and told her to "arrange" them for the dinner-table. Godfrey went into his study and remembered miserably

how he had once given Cynthia a field-poppy, and she had kissed it. Although he persuaded himself that she had probably thrown it into a ditch when his back was turned, he sighed. Why was transcendent virtue so much less charming in its methods than mere worldliness? It was small consolation to think that most men had wondered the same thing since the Fall of Adam; nor did it occur to him that the fault did not rest with virtue, but with what man is too apt to mistake for it.





II.

NUMBER one hundred and two, Curzon Street, Mayfair, was a house of mourning. That is to say, the blinds were pulled down and the servants crept about in new black dresses. In a small, brightly-furnished room at the back of the mansion the blinds were up, and the sun poured in on two ladies, one of whom was draped in crape and wore white muslin cuffs, as became the chief mourner. She was a little pale, a little subdued in her expression, extremely handsome. Her companion looked calm and dispassionate, slightly interested perhaps in a *Court Gazette* she was studying.

"For goodness' sake, Agatha, say something," said Cynthia, at last.

"Shall I read you this, dear? Can

you bear it?" said Agatha. And then she proceeded to read aloud the following:—

"The funeral of the late Sir Edward Cargill, Bart., of Northwold Hall, —shire, and 102, Curzon Street, Mayfair, was largely attended by the deceased's many relatives and friends. The Marquis of Saltford, Lord Charles Friern, the Right Honourable Reginald Newbury, M.P., the Earl of Drumdrosset, and Lord Whetstone, who were unavoidably absent, sent their carriages. The service was most impressively conducted by the Very Rev. the Dean of Mudborough, who more than once was visibly affected. The floral tributes were numerous and costly. The costume worn on this melancholy occasion by Lady Cargill was composed of rich Indian *cachemire* and *crêpe*, a most tasteful and appropriate *confection* from the *atelier* of Madame Adeline, 999, New Bond Street.'"

"That is too horrible," said Cynthia. "For once I did manage to rise above my dress. To have such things written about one is degrading. I won't stand it."

"You must think how much good

it will do Madame Adeline," said Agatha, smoothly. "One ought not to be selfish in such matters."

"I am tired of living. Everything I touch turns to mud."

"Poor dear! I suppose you will go abroad. There is really nothing else for you to do. May is such an awkward month for a death—just at the beginning of the season."

"I shall remain where I am," said Cynthia. "Why should I run away?"

"You will stay in town! That is so like you, dear. You always want to do the most improper thing you can think of. Surely you must see that you cannot remain here—and be even a little bit cheerful. People would talk. Whereas abroad, so long as you wear mourning, you can do anything."

"I shall not leave London," said Cynthia, firmly. "I have talked it all over with Aunt Theodosia. She is coming to stop with me; and I shall take up some kind of study, and—and try to be a little more serious."

She began her speech defiantly enough, but towards the end her voice grew faint.

The spark of amusement in Agatha's eyes seemed struck out of flint stones.

"I *can* be serious," said Cynthia.

"I don't think it would suit you if you were," said her sister.

The desire to please, combined with a painful sensitiveness to anything approaching ridicule, from no matter how contemptible a critic, was the essential weakness in Cynthia's character. She had enough sense to be conscious of this, and the knowledge was gall and wormwood; for she liked to think herself proud and independent, with a mind above other people's opinions. But, as she told Lady Theodosia, in one of her rare bursts of confidence, "What is the use of despising their opinions when I am at the mercy of their giggles?" That morning Agatha's cold smile was almost more than she could bear. She was on the point of promising to go abroad, the next day if need be, when another powerful weakness—namely, obstinacy—came to the rescue. She got up and put on her bonnet.

"Where are you going?" said Agatha.

"I am going to the British Museum," said Cynthia, flushing a little. "I am not likely to meet any one I know there, and this veil is thick. I can't sit here all day."

"You had much better lie down and have some beef-tea," said Agatha. "But of course if you insist upon going, and don't feel yourself that it's the most extraordinary, unheard-of thing to do, in the circumstances, it isn't for me to interfere."

"I wish you wouldn't look meek, Agatha, when you know you want to be disagreeable."

The sorrowful reproach on Agatha's countenance—which meant plainly that, although Cynthia might forget herself, she (Agatha) could only offer her other cheek to be smitten—filled her sister with remorse.

"Would you like that hat-pin?" she said.

Agatha looked at the ornament, saw that it had pearls on it, and swallowed her indignation with a smile.

"Are you sure you don't want it yourself, dear?"

So peace was restored.

Apart from the fact that her hus-

band had been dead little more than a fortnight, and conventionality demanded that she should retire more or less from the public view for the present, or, as Agatha suggested, go abroad, Cynthia's visit to the Museum did not fill Lady Theodosia, nor the Dowager Lady Cargill, with any great surprise. Cynthia went to the Museum frequently; so frequently, in fact, that Lady Cargill—prepared for the heathenish always in the case of her daughter-in-law—almost feared that she went there for the purpose of worshipping the Pagan gods. Lady Theodosia simply explained it as a "fancy." Agatha called it affectation. Cynthia, herself, said it was a rest.

If they had seen her that particular morning, wandering through the long galleries like some uneasy spirit, they would have thought that her idea of rest was somewhat inadequate. Her unusual height and grace, her deep mourning, and what her maid called "her way of putting on her clothes," attracted considerable attention from the intelligent public, who were scattered in thin groups through the various rooms. One man, who hap-

pened to be entering as she crossed the front hall, felt his heart leap at the sight of her. Then she turned her head in his direction. She stopped short, caught her breath, and cried "Godfrey!" By the time he reached her she had regained her self-command. "What a mercy it is," she said, "that people are eating their luncheon! They would have stared. But—you surprised me."

When a man loses his head it generally takes him some time to find it again. He feels as though he has to recognize it among a lot of other lost heads; for the moment he is not at all certain which is the right one—his own. Woman, more dexterous, catches it on the rebound.

"I too was surprised," said Godfrey. For the rest he could only remember that he had not seen her for more than three years: that she was the same Cynthia, that he was the same Provence: that they could no longer be the same to each other.

"I just came here for a change—I often do," said Cynthia. "I am not studying anything or going in for anything," she hastened to explain. "I suppose it's a fad."

"Have you seen the new mummy?" said Godfrey.

Cynthia laughed softly. "On the stage," she said, "we should have slow music for this situation, and then we should say appropriate things. What a help slow music would be in real life! But, since we have not got it, let us hunt for the mummy." So they started blindly down the gallery nearest them.

"I read the notice in *The Times*," said Godfrey. "I am sorry."

Cynthia reproached herself for having forgotten—in the first joy of seeing Provence again—a grief which it was certainly her duty to remember. Before she had married Edward she had something like affection for him: as her husband she had found him intolerable; when he was dead the old affection, half-pitying and protective, came back; his faults, seen through the mist of a crape veil, seemed pathetic weaknesses calling for compassion rather than blame: his virtues could be counted. There were tears in her eyes when she answered Provence. "I cannot tell you all about that yet," she said. "It was terrible that he should die.

He liked to live. Life was never dull to him: he thought it jolly, never anything else—only jolly. You won't think that's an absurd way for me to put it—you will understand. He, who thought this, is dead, whilst others——" She paused. She was not sure that life seemed so utterly worthless to her at that moment as it had—say, before she left Curzon Street for the Museum.

"You have changed a little since I last saw you," she said, abruptly. She did not like to add that he looked many years older. "Do you like success better than you thought you would?"

"I must have changed more than a little, to have you ask that," he answered. "Is conceit the usual accompaniment of wrinkles?"

"I did not say you were wrinkled," said Cynthia. "If you fly at me like that, for nothing, I shall soon know that you have not changed at all."

"Cynthia!"

"Yes, I mean it. And I think it would be a pity to quarrel, just yet, because there are a lot of things we might like to tell each other. Or—" then she stopped quite still and looked

at him swiftly and coldly; he knew the glance well—"perhaps you would rather not talk to me at all and I am taking too much for granted."

For answer he also gave a look which she, too, apparently knew well. Words would have been poor in comparison.

"Oh, my dearest!" she said, "why did you not write to me, that time? We have lost three years." For once in her life she spoke to him from her heart, and he caught a glimpse of the real woman. As an actress she was dangerously good: her art was more convincing than the average woman's nature: now she was natural it seemed to Provence, in comparison, as though a queen had been playing beggar-maid. But, as a man may wake from rosy dreams to find himself staring at a mud wall, she threw on her rags again before he could answer.

"I am getting sentimental," she said, hurriedly; "when I'm sentimental I'm tedious. You do the talking now. You haven't told me . . . Oh, Godfrey, I've just remembered!—you've got a wife."

He had never been more conscious, more completely, hopelessly conscious,

of this fact, almost to the exclusion of all other facts, in his life. He saw that if farcical comedy became personal it might cease to be amusing.

"Yes," he said, "there is Grace."

"Is that her name? I don't dislike it. It sounds like the good heroine in a novel—the patient, forgiving one who has a sweet expression. Is that being rude?"

"She isn't a woman you can sum up in a phrase. She has a great deal of quiet reserved force, and she doesn't get to one point and stick there. She developes. I have the highest possible regard for her," he added; with an absence, however, of spontaneity.

"Oh!" said Cynthia.

"She had everything against her, as a girl," he went on; "her mother was a very worldly woman and she lived in a worldly set. Yet with it all Grace managed to assert her own individuality and keep her interests centred in better things."

"I see," said Cynthia. "What were the better things?"

"Oh, well, I couldn't catalogue them. I gathered from what she said that the life she was leading did

not satisfy her, and—that—well, with with different surroundings and with people—or even one person—who could understand her, she might realize her better self. It was stunted, you know, situated as she was."

"Yes, I know," said Cynthia.

"That's really all," he said. "She didn't mind marrying me, and I thought, as I could never be happy myself, I might at least try to make some one else less miserable."

"Is she pretty?" said Cynthia, at once.

"She has charm, but she is not a beautiful woman—that is, as I understand beauty. But then, beauty is not everything."

"Oh no, it isn't everything, only—it's rather nice to have about."

"I think," he said, "we ought to go up these stairs—if we want to find the mummy."

"I am not particularly anxious to see the mummy," said she; "are you?"

"Oh, Cynthia, you are just the same."

"You can't see very much through this thick veil."

"I was not thinking of your face."

"Oh! . . . Have I grown dread-

fully plain?" She seized this opportunity to lift her veil up.

"No, you haven't," he said.

"I wish I were different," she sighed. "I should probably be better looking if my mind were nicer. I really do want to be more useful—I have got money now. Don't you think I might take an interest in hospitals and things?"

"By all means. I should send one of them a big cheque or found a Cargill Ward. The Cargill Ward, I think, might sound better, and really would not be any more trouble. I don't know, however, whether it would alter the shape of your nose or change the colour of your hair."

"You needn't be so brutal. You always make the worst of me."

"I wish I could think that I did. It is so disheartening to see a woman with any amount of honesty about her wilfully and deliberately contorting it all into something very different."

"Love me for my faults and not my virtues, dearest, and then I shall never disappoint you. I can always live up to *them*." Again that tantalizing glimpse of the real Cynthia. Not to defy the codes of polite

society, not to kiss her at once, not to forget mummies and Grace—for at least one moment—required some self-restraint. Let any man imagine himself similarly situated. Godfrey dared not trust his tongue. So he said nothing.

Cynthia continued: "Of course, I can't change myself and not love you, just because you are married. There is no etiquette about loving. I shall always love you—always—always. I would tell your wife so." This idea seemed to please her. "I should be proud to tell her; but perhaps she wouldn't like it. It's a very strange thing, but although a woman may love a man herself, she can rarely forgive another woman for loving him."

"That wouldn't apply to Grace," he said, quickly; "love was a question we never raised."

"Then she doesn't love you?" said Cynthia.

"Certainly not."

"Then she ought. I've no patience with her."

"But I don't love *her*," said Providence; "have you no patience with me?"

"That's quite a different thing. She probably isn't lovable. . . . I don't think I like Grace very much."

"You're both so utterly unlike. You wouldn't understand each other."

"I think we should understand each other well enough—if it comes to that. I'm sure I don't want to say uncharitable things, but it certainly wasn't nice of her to marry you when she didn't love you. I can't forgive that."

"But, Cynthia——" He did not like to remind her of her own marriage. She saw, however, what was in his mind.

"There is no comparison between her case and mine," she said. "*I* was in a temper. You had certainly tried me very much. You know, Godfrey, you can be very trying indeed when you like." •

"Trying! That is one of Grace's words."

"Is it? I will never use it again. . . . And what does she mean by calling you trying—you, of all men in the world? Trying, indeed! She must be very bad-tempered and—how dare she say such a thing?"

"She is not at all bad-tempered—

on the contrary, she is considered extremely amiable. I think she is, myself."

"Who couldn't be—with you? She can't help herself."

"But you were just saying how I once put you in a temper."

Cynthia's eyes darkened with reproach.

"I loved you. That made it another matter—and besides, it was all my fault. There! Have I not suffered enough for it?"

"Has no one else suffered?"

"Well, yes," said Cynthia. "I dare say poor Edward had rather a life of it."

He had no answer for that.

"Did you ever wonder what we should say to each other, if we met again?" said Cynthia. "I have, often. I used to think I should say, 'How do you do, Mr. Provence? How is your wife, and the baby? Isn't it a curious day?' and then I thought we should shake hands very stiffly, and perhaps you might introduce me to your wife and—and—"

"And what?"

"And that I should hate her with all my might, and go home and say

what a hideous gown she had on and—howl. It only shows that things never happen the way you think they will. To begin with, I knew, the moment I saw you, that it would be quite, quite impossible to call you Mr. Provence. Then I knew that if your wife had been with you I would not have spoken to you for five kingdoms, and then, I felt all over that in spite of the three years and Grace and Edward, after all, we still loved each other just as much, perhaps more, than we ever did—and—and it only proves that love is immortal, and tempers and things and whole centuries have nothing whatever to do with it. I know now that, even if we should never see each other again, it will be the same always.”

“But I shall see you again,” said Godfrey, who did not care for the “if.”

“Will you come to Curzon Street—not to-morrow perhaps, but the next day—about four? Aunt Theodosia is with me, and I shall make her stay a long time. Agatha and Lady Cargill go back to Speenham this evening. Agatha came up for the funeral—and her summer clothes.”

"So Agatha is not married?"

"She is waiting for Sir Galahad. I think she deserves him; but—if he does come—I dare say she will wonder whether he deserves her. . . . I suppose I ought to go home now. I don't want to go."

"I suppose you must," said Godfrey, just beginning to realize with despair that they would have to grow accustomed to partings.

"You will come the day after to-morrow?"

"I will come," he said.

She did not shake hands with him when they parted, but pinched his coat-sleeve. When she got into her hansom she kissed the fingers which had touched him. "Good bye," she said, and drove off.

Although his regard for Grace was still the highest possible, he did not think it a pity that Cynthia was so extremely unlike her.

Lady Theodosia was very much struck by her niece's altered appearance at dinner that evening. Her cheeks were red, and her eyes seemed lit by a hundred fires, and all of them blazing. Following her invariable policy, Lady Theodosia asked no

questions, but talked soberly and appropriately of solicitors, travelling-bags, and quinine. Her discretion, however, was not rewarded until she announced her intention, after a very slow evening, of going to bed.

"Don't go yet," said Cynthia. "I've got something to tell you."

"I know," said Lady Theodosia, "you've seen him."

"How did you guess?"

"You look as though you had," said her aunt, drily.

"He is just the same," said Cynthia; "there is no one like him."

"My dear! Surely his wife isn't dead."

"Don't speak of her, she's detestable."

"Wives always are detestable," murmured Lady Theodosia. "'*Think you, if Laura had been Petrarch's wife, he would have written sonnets all his life?*' Byron said that, and he was a married man. But wives and cats have nine lives."

"I don't want anything to happen to the creature," said Cynthia. "I only want to ignore her. Oh, what a mistake—what a fatal mistake he made when he married, and what a

designing thing she must have been ! ”

“ Did he say so ? ”

“ Of course not—as if he would ! You know he didn’t. No, he said she hated the world and wanted better things, which he couldn’t catalogue, and was extremely amiable and developed ; and she has charm, and he has the highest possible regard for her. Isn’t that quite enough to show that she must be horrid ? He will be certain to find her out sooner or later, that’s one comfort. I don’t believe in these women who revere their husbands, and these husbands who regard their wives—that is to say if their reverence and regard are worth having. If a man and a woman are constantly together, they must either dislike each other frankly or like each other frankly, without any beating about the bush with respect and the rest of it : that’s common sense, and if they don’t, one’s deceitful and the other— ”

“ Is a fool ? ” said Lady Theodosia.

“ No—an angel.”

“ Are more men than women angels ? ”

“ All the angels we know anything

about are men," said Cynthia. "Godfrey is coming to see me the day after to-morrow," she added, presently.

"There will be trouble," said Lady Theodosia, shaking her head. "Be advised by me—don't see him again. This is infatuation—the most dangerous disease in the world."

"Disease!" said Cynthia. "Infatuation may be disease—love is life."

Lady Theodosia turned even pale. "I never heard anything like it," she said. "Who would have guessed you had it in you? Can't you see that you're talking in a highly disgraceful manner? It's positively indecent. Edward not cold in his grave, and Provence with a wife! I see nothing in the future but the Divorce Court."

"Is that the trouble you mean?" said Cynthia. "Do you suppose for one moment that love like ours takes people to the Divorce Court? How little you must know about it!"

"It is so easy to talk like that at the beginning. Human nature is human nature."

"But human nature isn't love," said Cynthia.

Lady Theodosia shifted her ground. "But the look of the thing—how will it look? He will be coming here continually, and people will talk; perhaps his wife will hear of it. You may put it any way you like, the outlook is unpleasant."

"He is not the kind of man people could say things about. You have only to look in his face to see that."

"We are not all Cynthias in love. Besides, physiognomy doesn't go for much in a scandal. I will admit that I think he could be trusted. So far as evil—of one sort—goes, I don't really fear for either of you much. The Drumdrosset women, with all their faults, have no mud on their petticoats. What I am trying to urge upon you is this—that whenever there is a wife or a husband to be ignored, there is mischief."

"If that is all, I won't ignore her. I will go and see her and say, 'Madam, I love the very ground under your husband's feet!' What could she do?"

"First, she would think you mad; then, that in any circumstances you would be a very dangerous acquaintance for her husband. Heaven only knows what she would do."

"I suppose you are right. Only very dangerous people tell the truth about themselves: the wise try to tell it about other people; the discreet avoid it altogether."

"It is useless to talk reason to you in your present mood. At the same time I don't see how you can expect me to take you seriously. Here is a man you have not seen for three years; when you last saw him you jilted him—"

"I did not see him, I wrote; if I had seen him it would never have happened."

"I can't go into all that; at all events, he was jilted. Now you see him again, and come home and tell me that you love the ground under his feet. If I were asked the reason, I should say—"

"Well? What would you say?"

"I should say it was simply because he is out of your reach—or ought to be."

"He was mine first—he is still mine. He does not love the other woman."

"My dear Cynthia, you forget. You are the other woman—she is his wife."

"I don't believe that God thinks she is his wife!"

"People are so fond of quoting God, when the Law is inconvenient! And when God is inconvenient, they quote the Law."

"There is no law, either of God or man, to forbid my loving Godfrey. You may cut off your hand or pluck out your eye: but love is the very soul of you—you can't touch it."

"Dear! dear!" said Lady Theodosia; "if women once begin to talk about their souls they're done for. I must say I always thought there was none of that nonsense about you."

"I never thought so either," said Cynthia; "that's the delightful part of it all. You know the story of the Sleeping Princess."

"If I remember the story," said Lady Theodosia, "for one Princess asleep there was a palace full of snoring bores. And that just illustrates what I'm driving at. It is only now and then that a woman has a soul, and she generally happens in poetry and is always improper. Look at Haïdee."

"You make *Don Juan* your gospel!

How could a creature with any self-respect—quite apart from a soul—care for a Don Juan?”

“My dear Cynthia, it does not matter in the least what a man *is*—everything depends on what a woman thinks him to be.”

“I am not mistaken in Godfrey,” said Cynthia, quickly.

“Did I say you were? I should say he was far more likely to be mistaken in you.”

“Don’t you think there is anything decent about me?” said Cynthia, passionately. “Is he the one human being in the world who has faith in me?”

“And you jilted him!” said Lady Theodosia.

• “I did—I did. And to think that in spite of that, he can still call me honest—do you suppose that makes me care for him less? If I am worthless—if you are all right and he is all wrong—what then? Shall I not love him better for the mistake? After all, my love is real enough: there is no mistake about that.”

“You have been a long time finding it out.”

"You mean it has stood the test of time."

"Ah! You see, you didn't marry Godfrey."

"How can I expect you to understand my feelings?"

"I understand too well, and fear."

"Fear!" said Cynthia, scornfully.

"What is fear? Fear is for cowards."

"And for lookers on," said Lady Theodosia.

"If people talked, what could they say?" said Cynthia, after a very long silence. "Surely he can call here sometimes. There is no harm in that."

"It isn't as though you were his wife's most intimate friend," said Lady Theodosia.

"What vile minds people must have! Let them say what they like about me."

"May they say what they like about him? Do you want to see him pointed at? I dare say you are right and they won't be able to say much—but it will be enough. You must remember he is a well-known man. Any little bit of gossip about literary people and artists and all that set is always pounced on and exaggerated.

It makes them more interesting, in a low sense. You may tell me that love is stronger than death—than destruction—than the world. You will soon see that it is not stronger than scandal. Your love will bring him nothing but evil. You will be his stumbling-block."

"If I thought that, I would kill myself," said Cynthia.

Lady Theodosia waved her hand impatiently. "I thought you prided yourself on your courage. Meet your folly and conquer it. You will tell me that Godfrey is a man not easily influenced; that he of his own free will loved you, and always will love you; that he never has loved and never will love any one else. I grant all that. But all men are very much what women make them: their wills may be iron, but women don't attack them through their wills. They throw spells over their judgment. Sometimes the spell works for good—more often for evil; for women as a rule are meaner than men—though men are mean enough, Heaven knows."

"Do you think that my influence over Godfrey would be mean?" said Cynthia.

"No," said her aunt, speaking more gently, "if you were his wife it would only be for good. I used not to think so—now I feel sure of it. But as you are not his wife, your influence is only—can only be—dangerous. I don't pretend to be a good woman: you are much better, much stronger than I am really, and I want you to be always better. I—once—had an influence; I did not use it well. When I thought I was most proving my love, I was most thinking of myself."

Cynthia coloured painfully and began to tremble.

"Sometimes," said Lady Theodosia, "a woman can best show her love for a man by leaving him. In some cases it is the only thing she can do. Be brave, Cynthia."

"I will do what is best for him," said Cynthia. "As for me—without him there can be no best." Again there was a long silence. "I am asking so little," said Cynthia, at last, "so very little. Only to see him sometimes. It isn't much."

"Each time you see him it will be harder to say good-bye. Remember that."

"I am used to hard things. Have I not suffered enough these three long years—without him? And all that time I have never even mentioned his name: I have only thought of him—thought of him always."

"I am not asking you to forget him. But it is your duty to help him to forget you. Any woman can give up the world for a man—that is easy enough. When it comes to giving *him* up, for his own sake, it is another matter. If a woman can do that, it should atone for many sins."

Cynthia drew a long breath which sounded rather like a sob; then she went up to her bedroom. She came down half an hour later with a letter in her hand. Lady Theodosia saw that it was addressed to Godfrey. Cynthia posted it herself, as she had posted another letter nearly four years before. When she returned from the post it seemed as though she had lost her beauty. She was like one changed to stone.

"I have done it," she said to her aunt; "he will hate me when he reads it. When do you think I shall be able to cry?"

"I have not cried for twenty years,"

said Lady Theodosia—at which they both laughed. And yet it is said that women have no sense of humour.





III.



GEORGE GOLIGHTLY was a barrister, of the kind known as rising. He was considered extremely safe for a safe case ; to employ him for the defence meant professionally and to those who knew, that if one had fallen there was very little to prove it. To employ him for the prosecution meant that one was in possession of strong evidence, perhaps injured, not impossibly respectable. He worked hard and regularly : he made a good income : he dined with his banker—when he had no better engagement : the Lord Chief Justice called him Golightly : the wives of Queen's Counsels gave him at least a fortnight's notice when they asked him to dinner. In Lady Hemingway's phrase — he held a

position. To be rising is in many respects more agreeable than to have risen. In one case it is all looking forward, in the other it is all looking back—and looking back is not the joyfulest work in the world. Lot's wife was an allegory. George, therefore, was happy as mortals go. One morning, however, he awoke and was not happy—on the contrary, feverish, worried, and with no head for business. He had been dreaming of his cousin's wife. He tried to eat—he tried to read : he thanked God—being orthodox—that it was Sunday and he could be stupid without causing comment. He started for a walk and found himself making towards Bloomsbury : he turned back when he was in sight of Montague Street and Grace's window and walked back almost as far as Regent Circus. Then he hailed a hansom and went to Montague Street again. This time he went into the house.

Grace was at the piano when he was shown into the drawing-room.

"Godfrey is out," she said, and blushed a little.

"If he won't be long I can wait," said George ; "but don't stop playing

on my account, unless you are tired. I have had rather a bad night. Some music is just what I want."

"I did not sleep very well either," said Grace. "I suppose it's the weather—the sudden change."

"I dare say it is," said George, but they each avoided the other's eyes.

"What shall I play?" said Grace, hurriedly.

He began to turn over the loose music by her side. "What is this?" he said. "Gounod and Shelley. '*The fountains mingle with the river.*' I should like that."

"I will sing it," said Grace. She had a clear, rather melodious voice, and it had been well-trained. On that particular day she sang even better than usual, and managed to throw something which passed for passion into the song. But the song itself easily passes for passion, on paper.

When she had finished, George cast about him for something to say. "That is Art," he got out at last, "the real thing. Thank you."

"It is a man's song really," said Grace.

"Why?"

"Well, I think a man ought to sing it. Of course it is a man speaking. A woman wouldn't make love quite—quite that way. She wouldn't like to. You see it is rather—you know—rather—"

"Oh, yes, of course, it is rather—"

"It is very like Shelley, in fact."

"One can't help thinking," said George, after another long pause, "that Shelley knew what he was writing about. It's awfully true, what he says."

"Is it?" said Grace, playing Gounod's accompaniment very softly to fill the gaps in the conversation.

"Well, isn't it?"

"I don't know. It doesn't sound much like Godfrey, for instance."

"Oh! . . . Godfrey. Poor dear old Godfrey—hardly! He's an awfully good sort, but really—you know—he's got no more poetry about him than—than a whale."

"You shall not make me laugh!" and then she began a series of rather musical giggles. George noticed that she had a dimple in her cheek.

"You must admit it's the truth," he said; "he is a stick, isn't he? Bless him!"

"How can you? He's a kind, excellent husband—mama says so." At this she laughed till the tears came. A cold-blooded observer would have said she was inclined to be hysterical.

"I like to see a man with some passion about him," said George.

"What is passion, really?" said Grace. "I always associate it with bad temper." Her expression was that of a mild-eyed saint—in a glass window. Saints in real life are made of sterner stuff.

"Passion is—is Shelley and that sort of thing," said George, largely.

"I see. That explains what mama meant once when she told me never to mention it. She said it was a man's expression: that ladies never spoke of it. I was very young and inexperienced at the time, and I didn't understand her. But I don't think that girls ought to read poetry. It only fills their heads with ideas, and perhaps hopes, which can never be realized. Mama was right."

"Why do you say 'never realized' so sadly?"

"Was I sad?"

"Verv."

She played a wrong note. "One cannot help thinking," she said.

"Thinking what, Grace?"

"Of things," she said.

"I, too, think of things," he said, eagerly. "I think how different they might have been."

"It is too late now," she murmured, "we mustn't."

"I suppose we mustn't."

"We ought not," said Grace, severely.

"Thoughts will come," said George; "they're the very devil for coming."

"We won't talk about it," said Grace.

"I'm not sure that it isn't better to face facts and thresh them out," said George, who was pacing the floor.

"It requires so much courage, and I dare not." George knelt by her side and took both her hands. "You dare not? Then, Grace, you do—"

"Yes, I do—" Her face was so near and so pink he thought it was folly not to kiss her.

"That was wrong," said Grace; "there is Godfrey and little Elizabeth—"

"Where?" said George, springing to his feet.

"—to be considered," said Grace.

"Confound little Elizabeth!"

"How can you? And I'm her mother."

"But Godfrey is her father," said George. "I have to take that into account. Why on earth did you marry him?"

"Don't be cruel to me, George. I—I didn't know any better." George could not help thinking how very unpleasant she would seem, if he didn't happen to be in love with her. As it was, an indefinable fear began to creep over him. He wished he had never seen her; and kissed her again. This reassured him to a certain extent. It was absurd to be afraid of a woman he could kiss—and so easily.

"I should never consider the child before you," said Grace—"you are first. I would not like to take her away from Godfrey; he's so fond of her."

"Take her away!" stammered George; "of course not."

"You know I never did care for the world," continued Grace, softly; "the world is nothing to me. I have often thought of this day; I knew it

would have to come sooner or later. But now it has come, you must give me time to think, before I decide on any definite step."

"Of course," said George, feeling something like dislike for her.

"I cannot endure my life as it is," she went on. "We could begin a new life—together in Italy."

"Do you mean—we could run away?"

She nodded her head. "There is nothing else to do." She was tired of Montague Street, tired of her child, tired of Godfrey, tired of herself—above all, tired of being poor. "There is nothing else to do," she repeated, "is there? As you say, it is best to face facts. People would talk a little at first, no doubt, but they would soon get used to it. You see we can marry afterwards. That will make it all right."

George could only think of himself as a rabbit caught in a trap. He had nibbled the lettuce, and now he felt the iron teeth.

"We—perhaps we ought not to forget—everybody, Godfrey and your mother—"

"We must not judge them by our

selves. They have not so much feeling as we have, you must remember. Besides, Godfrey could get damages."

George started as though he had been stung. "Damages! Oh, he would never take damages."

"Husbands always do, dear," she said, sweetly. Then she pointed to the window. "See the rain!" she cried. "It will not be like this in Italy!"

Then she put one of her arms round his neck and leaned her head against his breast. She looked, somehow, simple enough and rather piteous. She was a little woman—he towered above her, and she had said that she loved him. He felt like a pillar of strength. Could he be harsh to a clinging, pathetic creature, with long eye-lashes? He put aside any consideration as to his loving her, and resolved to make the best of it.

"You will be kind to me, George," she whispered. "Remember that I am giving up everything for you!"

He ordered champagne with his dinner that evening and drank far too much of it, hoping it would make

him feel happy. He explained to the brother barrister who shared his chambers—an amiable man who knew any amount about Gregorian Music, and tiddled—that it was the funeral banquet to his career.

“My dear old chap,” said his friend, “for God’s sake, don’t you take to the bottle as well. See what it has made of me.”

“There are worse things than the bottle,” said George, wildly.

“You don’t mean to say it’s a woman.”

The unhappy young man hung his head.

“Shoot her!” cried his friend; “shoot her! A rope round your neck is a trifle compared to a woman, and hanging is quick.”

George hid his face in the sofa cushions and sobbed.

“You’ve been drinking,” said the friend, “and your nerves are queer. But shoot her! She’s carrion already.”





IV.

“YOU wrote to me once before, Cynthia.”

“Why do you remind me of that? It doesn’t help us to-day. The truth of the matter is that there is really nothing trustworthy about me. I don’t know my mind from one moment to the next. The one thing certain seems to be this—in some way or other I must find amusement.”

“Then when you spoke to me at the Museum as you did, it was for amusement?”

“Yes—if you like. I had been dull so long and I couldn’t resist the temptation. When I reached home I thought better of it and I wrote as I did. In the circumstances I

think that was rather decent—for me. I was afraid you might take me too seriously—again. An unnecessary fear, no doubt; but give me the credit of trying to put things right. It is not often that I want to do even that.”

They were both in the drawing-room at Curzon Street. Cynthia was sitting in an armchair; Provence was standing by the fireplace. He looked pale and careworn—Cynthia smiling and ironical.

“I refuse to believe that letter. If you did not speak the truth at the Museum, the whole world is a lie.”

“No, Godfrey, not the whole world—only me. Besides, I never said I didn’t like you: I couldn’t say that. But there is a difference between liking and loving. I can’t love any one—I have tried. I have no love to give, and I am not worth loving. Believe me; do believe me.”

“Are you being fair to yourself—or me—now?”

“Believe me!” she repeated.

“I believe in you always,” he said, quietly. “If faith could understand, it wouldn’t be faith.”

"If I loved you, how much I would love you for saying that!" She saw she had said too much and hastened to atone for it. "That really explains my feeling for you from the beginning. I always wanted to love you and—couldn't. That is why I think it will be so much happier, for both of us, never to see each other again. Your life is full of many things—first of all, your work. Love that, it will repay you better than loving me. As for my life, that will pass pleasantly enough. I have got what I always wanted—money. I would have loved you, only I loved money more. It was my first love, and I have been faithful to it. That should be a redeeming quality, shouldn't it? You can say I have been faithful to one love. That can't be said of every woman." She rose from her chair, and as she stood by him brushed a short golden hair from his coat-sleeve. She held it up to the light and it curled round her finger.

"That belongs to your child," she said, "not to Grace. I call that a rather pretty omen." The clock struck seven. "In an hour's time,"

she said, "Aunt Theodosia and I shall be starting for Dover. Agatha was quite right. I shall find it gayer abroad. Good-bye, and—Godfrey—believe me, but don't hate me."

And so they parted.

When Lady Theodosia came in a few moments later, she found Cynthia standing cold and passive where Provence had left her—by the fireplace. As her aunt entered she looked at the clock. "I suppose," she said, "we ought to hurry, or we shall lose the train."

Lady Theodosia's heart beat high with pride when she remembered that, after all, this self-control ran in the family.

It was not until Provence had wandered blind and despairing through the streets for more than two hours that he remembered a note he had in his pocket from Golightly's tippling friend. This note had evidently been written under considerable agitation, and entreated him to call that day. Provence decided to forego the grim pleasure of brooding over his own misery, and drove to Golightly's chambers.

The tippling friend, whose name was Collingwood, received him.

"Thank God, you've come," he said. "I'm in a devil of a way. I want to talk to you about Golightly. He's in trouble. God knows what's up, but something is going to happen. I feel it."

"What is the trouble?" said Providence.

"The usual trouble," roared Collingwood; "Potiphar's wife."

"Are you quite sure you know what you're talking about?"

"I don't know who the woman is, but I know she's a bad one. When a man talks of ruining himself for a woman he can't conscientiously call an angel till he's drunk two bottles of champagne, she must be awful—perfectly awful. But they're all awful—hell-cats every man-jack of 'em. He won't listen to me. He always says, 'You're a dear old sort, Collingwood, but you're drunk.' That's the worst of letting your friends know you've got a weakness—they despise you when you want to help them. But *you* can get at him—he's got respect for you. He hasn't any for me."

"I can't do anything unless I have

some facts to go on. You must see that yourself."

"Facts! Damn facts. I go by symptoms. I tell you the man is trying to drink himself into love—and he can't succeed. I've been trying to drink myself out of it for the last twenty years, and, take my word for it, Provence, it's a hopeless game in either case. I'm very fond of Golightly—he's been damned good to me. If he comes to grief, I shall lose my faith in human nature." He pushed the decanters towards Provence and poured out a glass of brandy for himself—which he swallowed, and again another—which he looked at.

"Have you any suspicion—any idea who she is?"

"Not the faintest. He told me I should probably know quite soon enough. He said this much, that her husband was a brick. I consider that a bad sign—his calling the husband a brick. It's too unusual. It proves conclusively the Potiphar theory."

"I will do what I can," said Provence, "but of course a matter of this kind wants very delicate handling

My wife has a great deal of tact, and he is very fond of her. I wonder if she could help us."

"Ah," said Collingwood, dropping his jaw, "*you've* got a wife; I forgot that."

"What do you mean?" said Godfrey.

"Nothing. But I always forget that fellows have got wives."

"Yes, I will talk it over with her," continued Provence. "She will be able to give very good advice."

"Women are so deep," said Collingwood.

"My wife isn't deep," said Provence, getting rather angry; "that is not a word I care for."

"Look here," said Collingwood. "I like you—it's a funny thing to say, but I do. At one time I didn't, And let me tell you this—Golightly thinks a lot of you. Don't be hard on him, now he's in a scrape. He's weak, and that woman has a hold on him. But there's stuff in him yet."

Provence wished him good-night and left him maundering in this strain over the brandy-decanter.

When he reached home it was past eleven, but Grace was reading in the

drawing-room. She was dressed in a lace tea-gown, and he thought she was looking even pretty: very innocent, too, and child-like. He was filled with remorse to think that the shadow of his lonely, monotonous life had fallen on so light and airy a being.

"Were you sitting up for me, Grace?" he said.

She yawned. "I don't mind the sitting up." She did not think it necessary to add that George Gollightly had been there the greater part of the evening. "I should like to be told, though," she went on, "when you intend to dine out."

"I haven't dined at all," he said; "but I'm very sorry if you delayed dinner for me. I have had one or two things to bother me to-day. I'm afraid George is in trouble. From all I hear from Collingwood, he has got into some entanglement with a married woman. Of course, I can be sure of one thing. Even if it comes to the worst, George would have to persuade himself that he was doing the right thing. He's rather easily led, but he would never act dishonourably with his eyes open. I would stake my life on that. I wish

I could find out who the woman is. Things may not be so bad as they seem. Can you think of any one?"

Grace shook her head. "Don't worry about it," said Godfrey, kindly; "you look quite pale and upset already. I ought not to have told you when you were so tired."

"I hate Collingwood," she said, faintly. "I don't believe one word he says."

"But now I think of it, I have noticed a change in George lately myself," said Provence. "I can hardly explain it, but he seems different. He used to be very frank and boyish in his manner; now he seems cold and reserved. Sometimes I have fancied he wanted to avoid me. . . . What a dull, sad business life is," he added, wearily; "it is not until everything has gone wrong that we see how easily it might all have been right. And always ourselves to blame, never any one else—only ourselves."

"I could be happy enough," said Grace, "if it wasn't for other people's interference;" and she went upstairs to her bedroom.

'Twelve o'clock struck, and one—and still Godfrey sat thinking. At half-past one he was roused by a furious knocking at the hall-door. When he opened it Collingwood rushed in, pale, stricken and breathless.

"We are too late, Provence," he cried; "I told you something would happen. He has shot himself. He is dead."

They heard a woman's cry behind them. Grace had seen Collingwood drive up, and had crept to the top of the stairs to hear what was said. When the first shock of his news had passed she came slowly down the staircase, with one trembling hand on the railings, with the other clutching vainly at the wall.

"Did he leave any letter behind him," she said, when she finally reached the hall.

"Not a line," said Collingwood.

She burst into hysterical tears. "There is nothing to prove, then, that it wasn't an accident?"

"Nothing," said Collingwood, sternly.

For the first time she turned to wards Godfrey. "It — is — too

dreadful — to realize — all at once.
I—never had strong nerves."

Collingwood left her sobbing on her husband's arm. But the tragedy was in Provence's face, for although he held her he looked away.



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